

ORDINARY MEETING OF WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

HELD AT COUNTY BUILDINGS, WHITEGATES, WICKLOW TOWN
AND VIA TEAMS

ON

ON MONDAY, 2 OCTOBER, 2023 AT 2:00PM

STENOGRAPHER: Niamh Kelly-Leahy, RMR, MBIVR

Transcript provided by
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PROCEEDINGS COMMENCED ON MONDAY, 2ND OCTOBER 2023 AT 2:00PM, AS FOLLOWS:

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, everybody. You are very welcome. Sorry, folks. You are very welcome, everybody. I think we will get started.

Helen, I will hand over to yourself to do a roll call.

MS PURCELL: Yes. Just on the etiquette. We have a good few members joining us remotely today. I would remind you to keep your mobile phones on silent, please, and your cameras on. If you have any difficulty connecting with us, particularly if there are any votes or anything, please let us know. I would also like to welcome the members of the public who are present. Thank you very much.

I'll start now with the roll call.

Councillor Tommy Annesley.

COUNCILLOR ANNESLEY: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Mark Barry.

COUNCILLOR BARRY: Present.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Joe Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Vincent Blake.

COUNCILLOR BLAKE: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Sylvester Bourke.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: (No audible reply).

MS PURCELL: Councillor Melanie Corrigan.

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Avril Cronin.

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Shay Cullen.

COUNCILLOR CULLEN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Erika Doyle.

COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Present.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Gail Dunne.

COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Anne Ferris.

COUNCILLOR FERRIS: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Pat Fitzgerald.

COUNCILLOR FITZGERALD: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy.

COUNCILLOR FLYNN KENNEDY: Present.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Tom Fortune.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Patsy Glennon.

COUNCILLOR WALSH: Councillor Glennon is outside. He's on his way in.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Mary Kavanagh.

MS LEONARD: She's on her way in.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Pat Kennedy.

COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Peir Leonard.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Present. Councillor Grace McManus.

COUNCILLOR MCMANUS: Anseo.

MS PURCELL: Present: Councillor Derek Mitchell.

COUNCILLOR: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor John Mullen.

COUNCILLOR MULLEN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Miriam Murphy. We have apologies from Councillor Murphy.

Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Anseo.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Paul O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR PAUL O'BRIEN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. With apologies from Councillor Rory O'Connor. Councillor Gerry O'Neill.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: He will be online.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Lourda Scott.

COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Present.

MS PURCELL: Councillor John Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Stephen Stokes.

COUNCILLOR STOKES: Present.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Edward Timmins.

COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: Here.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Gerry Walsh.

COUNCILLOR WALSH: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present: Councillor Irene Winters. Apologies. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: That is great. Thanks, Helen.

I am just going to open up the floor now for votes of sympathy. Just before we start, I just want to note the passing of Patrick Murphy, father of our colleague, Councillor Miriam Murphy, and we just remember Miriam at this time.

Also, James Doran, who is the late son of -- son of late Pat Doran, our former councillor, who also tragically has passed away.

I am just going to open up the floor.

Councillor John Mullen.

COUNCILLOR MULLEN: Again, just to echo, I suppose, the community of Carnew is in shock this morning, and the wider GAA community is in shock at the tragic passing of James Doran, known

affectionately as The Bear Doran, last night. It's in deep shock. He was heavily, heavily involved in the GAA. So everybody who knows anything about Wicklow GAA or Wicklow hurling would know that James Doran at every match, a passionate supporter of all things GAA.

He's also heavily involved in Carnew Community Care, as was his father, Councillor Pat Doran, and up to last week was involved in day-to-day deliveries of Meals-On-Wheels to vulnerable, isolated people in rural areas, and that's a measure of the man's commitment and heart. It's a very tragic development.

To his sons and daughter, Padraig and Marie, his wife, Eileen, Gavin, his son-in-law, and to his brothers, Patrick, Kevin, Brian and Colette. Our deepest condolences at this very, very sad time.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

Councillor Paul O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR PAUL O'BRIEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I'd like to be associated with the past two condolences as well from yourself, Cathaoirleach and Councillor Mullen. I just want to pay my respects and offer my condolences to Catherine (Clare) Mooney from Charnwood in Bray. She died a view weeks ago, and I know she will be sadly missed by her husband Jimmy and her daughters, Linda and Yvonne. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Tommy Annesley.

COUNCILLOR ANNESLEY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Yes, I would just like to send my condolences also to the family of Paddy Murphy. Paddy Murphy was -- that's Councillor Miriam Murphy's father. He was a good old age, 90 years of age, but he went downhill in the last three months. And he was a good horse dealer. We bought many a thoroughbred -- well, he told us they were thoroughbred, but we bought them anyway.

So Paddy is very highly thought of. So my condolences to Miriam and Paddy and Mary and all the lads. And he had a great -- he really had a great -- at the Dublin Horse Show, his grandson done very, very well in that competition, he came third, and Paddy Murphy was so proud of Brendan Murphy, who's gone on to horse jump now for the Irish team as well. So my condolences and also to the Doran family. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Gerry Walsh.

COUNCILLOR WALSH: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I would also like to be associated with the expression of condolences to the family of James Doran. I have known James over a long number of years through his involvement in the Wicklow GAA. I served with him on the Wicklow County Board committee for over 15 years. His sudden passing will be a huge loss to his family and to the Carnew community in general. He was just Carnew through and through. Never missed a match, and was an active advocate at county board level at the meetings. So certainly, he will be missed.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Vincent Blake.

COUNCILLOR BLAKE: I just join with the proposal of sympathy as well to the Doran family on the passing of James, and to Miriam on the passing of her father, Paddy, as well.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Avril Cronin.

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Thank you very much, Cathaoirleach. I would just like to express our sympathies to our colleague, Sheena Hubbard, on the passing of her partner, Ciaran Griffin, who died tragically recently. I would just like to express our sympathies to Sheena, please.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Mary Kavanagh.

COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: I just want to be associated with the vote of sympathy to Miriam on the passing of her father, and I also want to offer condolences on the passing of -- to Lauren Keogh's family. Lauren Quinn. Keogh was her married name. But Lauren was an inspirational member of the community in Wicklow, and she passed away the week before last, and she was only 41. And in those years, she had done an awful lot of work for the homeless and the underprivileged, and she was a remarkable woman; so I just wanted to offer condolences to her family.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. With no other members coming in, Helen, do you want to come in?

MS PURCELL: We extend our sympathies to the families of Michael Cashin, father of our colleague Con Cashin; Jim Spencer, father of our colleague, Andrew Spencer; Catherine McAlister, mother of our colleague, Danny McAlister; Evelyn Lawlor, mother of our colleague, Audrey Bowen; William Byrne, father of our colleague, Ciaran Byrne; and Paul Kearns, father of our colleague, Jeff Kearns.

(Moment of silence).

May their souls and the souls of all the faithfully departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, colleagues.

Colleagues, we have one request for a suspension of standing orders. The request comes in from Councillor Joe Behan and Councillor Tom Fortune. "That this Council views with extreme concern the fact that two separate and distinct proposals to construct bus lanes on (i) Castle Street, Bray and (ii) on the N11 between Fassaroe and Glen of the Downs have been progressed without ever being formally discussed at any meeting of Wicklow

County Council despite the fact that they will be extremely negative repercussions on local Bray people and businesses in the case of Castle Street and on many thousands of motorists and commercial drivers in Bray, Enniskerry, Kilmacanogue and surrounding areas in the case of N11.

That this Council therefore calls for the following actions to be taken...

(i) That the NTA removes the bus lane planned for Castle Street, Bray from the Bus Connects scheme submitted to An Bord Pleanála.

(ii) That the proposal by Kildare County Council, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, NTA, TII and Wicklow County Council to close permanently the N11 access to and from the Herbert Road, Enniskerry Road and many other minor entrances and the proposal to install traffic lights at Hills Roundabout be withdrawn and the funding for the major N11/M11 Upgrade scheme be restored by the Government."

The proposal to take that suspension of standing orders is at half four, if people are okay with that. Is that agreed?

(Agreed).

CATHAOIRLEACH: Great. Thank you, colleagues.

So just at our recent protocol committee meeting, we just spoke briefly around the time that's in our standing order for speakers, so that is three minutes. So we are just going to ask everybody to try and stick by that.

Not in our standing orders, but in agreement put by the members was a time limit of ten minutes per presentation. So just to those who are going to be presented to the members today, we are going to stick strictly to that ten-minute time slot, just to allow members the opportunity to ask questions.

So we will start with item number 1 on the agenda: To confirm and

sign minutes of the ordinary meeting of Wicklow County Council held on Monday, 4th September 2023. And there was a copy attached.

Can I get a proposal? Councillor Paul O'Brien. Councillor Pat Fitzgerald. Thank you. Is that agreed?

(Agreed).

CATHAOIRLEACH: The next item on the agenda is to approve a temporary overdraft. Accommodation of 20 million for the financial year ending 31 December 2024. Brian Gleeson, I will invite yourself in there. Thank you.

MR GLEESON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. This is our annual request that we look for our overdraft facility. We, fortunately, haven't had to dip into that facility over the last number of years, but it is a standard request that we come to every year, just to do with timing issues in relation to expenditure we might be incurring and having to claim back, and in case there are any time delays and so forth.

So if I can get a proposer and seconder for that, please?

CATHAOIRLEACH: So Councillor Edward Timmins.

COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: Yes, I am happy to propose that overdraft.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor John Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: I will second it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Seconded. Is that agreed? (Agreed). Thank you, members.

The next item is to consider the chief executive's monthly management report September 2023.

MS O'GORMAN: Good afternoon, members. As you can see from the report, it is very comprehensive. There's an awful lot going on. And I suppose we are heading into kind of awards season as well. A lot of very significant projects in Wicklow County Council that

have been achieved over the last 12 months have been listed for consideration for the Irish Public Bodies awards, the LAMA awards, et cetera. So we are working towards that.

Some of you will note that the eco trail took part at the weekend, over 1300 participants. I know it wasn't the most clement of weathers on Saturday for those participating, but, by all accounts, it was a very successful event.

Just to note again, I suppose, town and village renewal scheme. We are working through that at the moment, and that is very important that those projects get advanced and we get them submitted to the Department.

To note as well, we have a new website showcasing our Greenway projects throughout the county. I suppose that is a kind of an information portal for members, just to be aware of and also to note that the Blessington town centre first plan is on public consultation at the moment through the portal. So I would encourage those of you that have an interest in the development of Blessington to make your views known on that. And other than that, we're happy to answer questions. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, chief executive.

Councillor Gail Dunne.

COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just two issues. One good and one bad. The first one is, I would just like to thank the Council for all the work that has been done with regard to the dredging of Wicklow Harbour. Minister Jack Chambers was in Wicklow last Thursday, and he was down looking, and there's a meeting this week with Minister Darragh O'Brien. So I just want to thank the Council for all the hard work that they have done. The second thing is, the situation that has arose on the Greenhill Road over the affordable housing. I am sure we have all got reps

from different people. There's an issue with the HomeBond. And I accept that the Council are doing their best to work their way around this issue. But it has -- it really has caused untold damage to people up there. There's people who have -- they're going to miss out on their mortgages. There's people who gave their notice into houses to move out of, into houses that were rented, to move out of the houses, and we, as public reps, can't really tell them, because, in fairness to the Council, they don't know what's going on. From what I am led to believe, HomeBond aren't even answering their telephones.

And I am wondering is there -- the fact that I am meeting Minister O'Brien on Wednesday -- but is there any way that we can get around this? Because the members of the -- who are lucky enough to get houses in this scheme, which I fully supported, are now in limbo land, really. A lot of them are in limbo land. And it is something that really needs to be looked at. You know, I really didn't want to bring it up here today, but I think it has just gone on far enough. So maybe the chief executive could just let me know about that. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. I am actually just going to let the chief executive in there, because there has been some recent discussions, just in case any of the members have worries around that.

MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thank you, Councillor Dunne, for raising the matter. It is hugely, hugely important and a very serious matter for those people that were successful in being allocated one of the affordable housing units in the Greenhills Road. As you know, HomeBond is a requirement for a lot of the mortgage companies, the banks. And we did, on the 21st August, got agreement from HomeBond to afford cover to

those units. We agreed a price with them. And from that date forward, there has been absolutely no contact with HomeBond; that is despite daily contact from members of the Housing Department, from myself, phone calls, emails. To be very honest with you, it is just not good enough, you know, to not even get a response from an agency like that.

I did send a note to the members last week saying that I was in discussion with the Minister about it, and I did speak to the Minister briefly about it last week, and then again this morning about it in person. He has undertaken to give the chief executive of HomeBond a call this afternoon. It is just not good enough. We have people at the pin of their collar trying to move into homes, really, much desired homes, and the difficulty that they have is that their mortgage offers are expiring and they're likely to be in higher interest rates, which is just not good enough. So I am hoping that I will have a response to be able to issue to the members on a positive note, if not this evening, by tomorrow. So I am going to thank -- go on record and thank the Minister for interview, because they're not -- if they're not responding to the officials of the Council, if they are not responding to the members of the chief executive of the Council, it is really just -- you know, it is beyond belief. If I behaved like that, you would hold me to account for it, you know. So I'm hoping that we should have a more positive response this evening. As soon as I do hear back from Minister O'Brien, I will send a note to you all on the matter. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, chief executive, on behalf of the members. Thank you also for intervening there, because I know you've put a lot of work into it.

Councillor Joe Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Yes. I just want to follow up what Councillor Dunne has said, and he put it very well. The pain and heartache that these people, who were successful, have gone through certainly in the last three months, is dreadful. It is nine months since that scheme was launched, and it was one of the first, if not the first in the country. And I do recognise that the chief executive and the housing director have done absolutely everything they can possibly do to resolve this situation, and I appreciate that, and I appreciate the fact that we all got the email updates last week.

As far as I can recall, at our last meeting, the chief executive said she was writing to the Department about this, and I presume you did, through the chair. I am quite shocked that it took a conversation between the chief executive and the Minister this morning, and the Minister to say, I'll give them a ring, that that is the level at which the Department are separating; that the chief executive has to talk to the Minister or Councillor Dunne, and he's going to give HomeBond a ring.

Is this the way this affordable housing scheme is going to be run throughout the country? The Minister has a lot to worry about, if this is going to be the precedent that is going to be set for other schemes that will happen down the line, both here and in other parts of the country. And could I ask, chief executive, my specific question is this: what did the Minister actually say? Was he aware of the problem? Number one. And was he aware that you had written to his department a month ago about this? And why is he only contacting HomeBond today? Why is this being let drag out? I think it'll be interesting to know what are the answers to those questions.

But I do appreciate you're bona fide on this, and I think you have

done everything you can do, but it is not good enough, as you said yourself, chief executive. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor John Mullen.

COUNCILLOR MULLEN: Again, Cathaoirleach, I thank the chief executive for the report, as usual, and an awful lot of detail in it. I particularly want to thank her and her team, and the team to do with the Greenways. I think there was a red letter achievement last week with the publication of the detailed websites and the start of the public consultation on the long-awaited Arklow-Shillelagh Greenway. The first public consultation was held in Arklow last week, which was very well attended, and a huge positive reception to the Greenway.

The production of the detailed route, preferred route options, are an extraordinary depth of detail and explanation on each preferred route. There are two more meetings to take place, I think, this week in both Aughrim and Shillelagh. And again, I want to praise the team that you have down there doing those consultations for making themselves available to various interested members of the public.

But just to follow on, it is essential, then, that we move on, then, to allocating that -- I know the public consultation is open to the 2nd November, and through the online system, those who cannot make those meetings can make their observations in favour or whatever via the online system, because this is a 16-year saga. It is a long-awaited development. It is a game changer for tourism in the southwest region, and we really need to get the plan. But I thank you for this major achievement getting to the online public consultation and the public consultations.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, councillor. Councillor Edward Timmins.

COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: Thanks, Chairman. Just briefly, I would like to acknowledge the visit by Minister Darragh O'Brien to Baltinglass this morning to launch the affordable housing scheme. It was a very welcome visit. And I'd also like to thank the CEO for attending that event this morning, at a very short notice for all of us. It is the first affordable housing scheme in west Wicklow, and hopefully it will be one of many, many more to come. So I would just like to acknowledge that.

Just a small proviso. It is not part of this meeting's remit, but, the income limits on people buying affordable houses, I think, for couple it is 66,000, does seem a little bit low, so I think it is something we should pursue to get increased. Like, I think the income for a home loan, the income, 80,000, I know it's a different thing, a loan, versus qualifying for buying an affordable house. But 66 does seem a very, very low a figure for someone who I believe would be a very worthy candidate. But good to see what happened this morning. And thank you again.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Peir Leonard.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thanks for the chief executive's report. There's an awful lot in it, which great to see all the good things happening. I am just looking for an update on the Arklow Flood Relief Scheme. I suppose, I was elected on the back of lobbying to get a better scheme, and we are heading towards nearly five years ago now. So although we, in Arklow, need the Flood Relief Scheme and we got the changes and stuff like that, we are eager to kind of get it progressed now, because the water works, the Irish water works have taken up so much the business of the town a lot, you know, sort of; so to face another five years or so of Flood Relief Scheme works, we just need to get it going as fast as possible. I'm just looking for an update on that. Thanks.

And then just, also, the Avoca Mines Remediation Project is referenced in the chief executive's report, and I'm just wondering could we expand a bit more on that, and is there a timeline on that, and when is it due to start, and who would be involved in that? Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Gerry Walsh.

COUNCILLOR WALSH: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks to the chief executive for the report. Just, firstly, on the housing section, I wonder would it be possible to get some detail around the column there in relation to vacant houses. There's figures there around completed work in progress, the here today figures; maybe more detail somewhat at least around that, and timeframes around completion and reallocations, et cetera.

Again, I look at the arrears figure there, the rent arrears figure; it continues to go in the wrong direction, despite a -- I think there was commitments made to address that, and I thought it was going in the right direction, but obviously it's slipped again. I think the figure now is probably unprecedented in terms of its height.

Also, the local authority home loans, I am just wondering -- there is an approval rate there, and I wonder what the refusal rates are like. The overall figures there would appear low in terms of the number of applications. I am just wondering is there a reason for that. Is it the criteria? Just what the experience there is from the staff dealing with those type of applications.

And lastly, just the cliff walk. I brought it up at the last meeting. Still waiting for a response. The cliff walk between Bray and Greystones, is there any update there in relation to the agreement there with the landowners. And staffing levels at Greystones is another issue there. We have one engineer operating

there for the last number of years, and, you know, an inordinate amount of work there on his desk, and there are vacancies there that have yet have to be filled. I am just wondering is there any update on that.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. I will have the chief executive come in there.

MS O'GORMAN: Just to come back on the HomeBond issue first, Councillor Behan. Yes, the Department officials are in a similar boat to myself. They have no joy in contacting -- or getting a response from HomeBond. Neither did the housing delivery coordination office. So we reached out at every official level that we could to try and move this matter along. As I said, they reached an agreement with us, but it took a serious amount of effort by the housing team to get it over the line.

I suppose part of the difficulty in this scenario, and I wouldn't like to think this would translate into all of the other affordable housing schemes, is that, originally, you will recall that the Greenhills Road scheme was not going to be an affordable scheme, it was to be a social housing scheme, and because we transitioned it to affordable, which was the right decision to make, HomeBond would normally be engaged at the get-go of the process, and because of the change, they were reluctant to come on board. That's not an excuse for their absolute radio silence now, I would have to say.

So I just think the behaviour to date has been completely unacceptable. And I didn't want to be annoying the Minister with it today, to be very honest with you. I thought it was something that, between ourselves and the Department, we should be able to sort out. But they are not responding to anybody.

I might hand over then to Breege on Arklow Flood Scheme and the Mines, please.

MS KILKENNY: Good afternoon. Just in terms of the Arklow Flood Relief Scheme, Councillor, we had to tender out for the consultants. So that process is nearing the end now. We have had the evaluation of that, and so that appointment will be happening in the next week or two, I would imagine. The other thing is, we did have difficulty retaining staff, but, at the moment, it will look that we will have an executive engineer starting within the next week as well, to move the project forward.

In terms of the Avoca Remediation, overall remediation, we are working with the Department of the Environment, Communication and Climate Action, working with them in partnership to move that project forward. We haven't signed an SLA with them yet, but, what we have agreed to do, and which has been in place, and I had briefed the members of Arklow Municipal District at the time, we agreed to assist in terms of the emergency works in relation to the mines. So we have a staff member who is on -- basically, on every weekend, just checking in terms of the safety measures. We have also got approval now to continue the fencing around, let's say, the more dangerous aspects of the mines.

So we would be hopeful, in the future, that we will be able to progress on as a specific project. There is a lot of money involved associated with it, so we want to be sure that the Department are going to help fund it. But at the moment, we are addressing the significant health and safety issues associated with the mines.

So I think that is really where it is at. Unless the chief executive wants to say any more.

MS O'GORMAN: No. We did have an on-site meeting with the senior

Department officials where we walked the mines, walked all the land, so -- just so they understood what we were talking about, you know, even from the fencing point of view. Very important to get them there. So the assistant secretary with the responsibility for that area is very keen to progress and remediate and to develop the site, potentially, you know, for industrial heritage tourism side of things. There is an awful lot that can be done, but it is a long-term project.

So at the moment, we are acting as agents for the Department in just securing the site, and they are the landowners, and I suppose they would be very keen for us to take ownership of it, but we are not going to do that until we are sure that it is safe and that the funding is there to remediate it fully.

So we will keep members updated as matters progress with the Department. But very positive in terms of their engagement with us and their willingness to deal with the site in its entirety. It is very positive.

MS KILKENNY: I would also just say that we are taking the -- let's say the more significant projects that are relatively small, that the Department are going to agree to agree with, so to move forward and to progress. And as we get approval in relation to those, I will brief the members. Okay?

MR LANE: The first one, I think you have answered, Councillor. You answered the question yourself on the list. There's significant works being undertaken in the district, and sometimes that requires resource prioritisation, and sometimes it may not be -- it may have to be dealt with within the resources available. However, the areas have prioritised units as we require them. There's also a budget issue. I think at least one area has gone well over its budget already, and we are working to see if we have

extra allocations. So there is an amount of units being -- being -- there's specific questions regarding possessing the amount of units and at times we get them, particularly, I think, in one of the areas, we try to prioritise three-bedroom units, because we have two-bedroom units. So there is significant work. There has been a particular question regarding it which I might ask later on. But other than that, they are moving away and there -- there is an system, within the area -- again, within the area of allocated resources, also.

Home loans. Nothing that I am aware of there. It is systematic. There is an application-driven. There are criteria, and we then send them to the housing agency who act as our underwriters. So in the case that there may be -- if people don't satisfy the bond requirement, don't give the assurance that is required, sometimes we work with them to explain it can be worked, but not in cases that the -- the applicant has to do a little bit more work on it, the record isn't there to justify -- our underwriters would be happy with the loan, to give a loan in that situation.

Just on housing, affordable in general. Because remember, there is a national scheme called the First Home Scheme, which is a shared equity between the developer and the applicant themselves. It doesn't come through us. The shared equity goes through another vehicle, so another entity. And it is just the housing. So they are also being used. I might get statistics for Wicklow at some stage from the First Home Scheme, just to get details on that.

As regards rent arrears. Yes, rent arrears are challenging. We know that. As we've detailed, one of the problems is the lengthy process, the four-letter -- four to five-letter process before we can go through legal action, and, on top of that - I know you've

heard it before - but arrears increased steadily over the Covid period between 2020 to '22. During this period, no legal action was permitted against the account. Revenue collections were not permitted to collect at doors, and, therefore, there is a build-up there.

This lengthy process commenced -- like I said earlier on, we have written out to all arrears -- all tenants in arrears, and continue monitoring. That lengthy process has been entered into in a number of cases where we didn't get any interaction, and it's likely that some of those will come to termination or come to fruition at some stage in the short-term.

That's it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: That's great. Thank you so much.

Councillor Silvester Bourke.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I just query there from the Housing Section. It's mentioned there that there's a plan design stage for 75 houses at Tinahask. Could you just update us about how advanced that plan is? Because it's appeared there for the last few months. What I notice missing from the report there was public private partnership proposed for Tinahask as well, for an adjacent site, and I am just wondering why that is not mentioned in the report. Is there a problem, or is that still going ahead as well, and what is the timeframe like for that?

Because it was mentioned about a year ago here that it was number 3 on the list, and I am wondering has it moved up, higher up the list at this stage? Has it made much progress?

And I just want to finally mention that the planning section sent out an email there today, I presume everybody got it, to say that the Ballinclare Quarry infill proposal has been refused An Bord Pleanála, which I welcome as well. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

Councillor Lourda Scott.

COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thank you to the chief executive for the report. Just a couple of questions, and one comment. I just wanted to compliment the Council staff along with Greystones Tidy Towns regarding the Pride of Place presentations. They did a wonderful presentation, which showcased all the hard work of all their volunteers to the judges recently in the district office, and it was just a really good afternoon. So thank you to the Council staff in there in relation to that.

Just a couple of questions. One was on the Community Recognition Fund. I am just wondering, for our own district, when we will see the work started on that in Greystones, and just is there any time limit on the money in terms of when it has to be spent?

And the second question is around housing again. And I have sent in detailed questions on this into the housing section back in the summer, but I have yet to receive a response, so I am raising it here. And it is about empty apartments in Archers Wood, and also in Hawkins Wood. There's two- and three-bedroom duplexes, two-bedroom apartments, which I believe are being managed by Tuath. I think I raised this earlier on in the year as well, and I just have a concern about the length of time these apartments seem to be vacant, and is there allocation issues, is what I am wondering, between Wicklow County Council and Tuath.

And I know Joe has responded to me on this about six or seven months, but I am still getting people contacting me saying there are empty units in both of these estates, and, really, what is going on? And I am just wondering if we can an update on that or some direction information from Tuath to see what is going on; because they are new builds, and they seem to be lying vacant for

an awful long time. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Shea Cullen.

COUNCILLOR CULLEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just one issue. I want to raise an issue in terms of rural and regional roads, and it is to do with the overhanging and dangerous trees in roadside boundaries. I raised this issue last week at our Municipal District meeting. I just feel that it is an issue that is really countywide and needs urgent attention.

I suppose, from my point of view, we publicised the non-cutting of hedges and ditches in the closed season, and that is absolutely fine. But we don't seem to publicise or promote the cutting of hedges or ditches or trees in the open season. And in terms of the dangers right across the county with overhanging trees and non-cutting of ditches, I don't think can be underestimated in terms of the road safety and the problems that that brings.

And basically, it's got to a stage where we all are aware that motorists are being forced, in my view, to drive in the middle of the road, particularly if they have large machinery, large lorries and so on. And it's a really, really serious situation on rural -- in particular on rural roads. And I am asking the Council to come forward and promote a campaign of tree cutting, or tree pruning we might call it, and hedge cutting around the county, and make the roads safer in Wicklow. Because at the moment, the roads in Wicklow are not safe for people to drive. I think it is a very, very serious situation. I think it is getting worse. I think we have a situation where landowners maybe aren't forced to understand their responsibilities. And it is not just about farmers. It is about landowners. It could be somebody that has a hedge outside their home, they don't seem to want to cut it,

it forces people out on the middle of the road. And I think it is something we need to promote in terms of our county, and the Council here, and the responsibilities that we have for road safety.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Mary Kavanagh.

COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Has there been any progress on the sites that the Council were going to identify for community gardens and allotments? We talked about maybe after the summer break, there would be some movement on that.

The second thing is, is there any update on the proposed Murrough Works. Because there has been yet another storm, Storm Agnes, there has been more damage, and work was scheduled to begin in September with Iarnród Éireann, and, to date, there hasn't been anything. So I just want to know if there is an update on that. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Chief executive, if I ask you to come in.

MS O'GORMAN: I will get Michael to come in on the community response forum, and then on the regional roads I'd ask Leonora to come in, and I will come back in then on the gardens of the Murrough lands.

MR NICHOLSON: Just in relation to a question earlier by Councillor Walsh on the cliff walk in Greystones, we have made significant progress. We are dealing with, as you know, four landowners, which also means we are dealing with four sets of solicitors, and we are making good progress in conjunction with the Greystones staff and their own law agent in here. Offers have been made, and the final details are being discussed. We would

hope to have a very positive outcome in the very near future. I will keep the members posted, but there is a lot of progress since the last meeting.

In terms of staff, we do have a complement of three engineering staff in Greystones; two engineers and a technician. As you know, up to the last two weeks, we've only had one engineer. The good news is, the second engineer started two weeks ago. So that has increased their engineering by a hundred percent, which is great, and that will make a big difference for Rory. The technician -- we're still awaiting that, plans have expired. We may have to re-advertise. But at least we have doubled their engineering, which is great.

As regards to the Community Regulation Fund, as you know, we got 1.6 million for the county, spread across the five MDs. Work is progressing on all five. In a lot of cases, it's just preliminary work and preparatory work. There hasn't been much actual spend. We have until the end of next year to spend that, because the Department are aware we do have a lot of preparatory work, so all the money will be spent by the end of next year. I'd expect some of it to be spent by this year, because I know in Bray in particular work was actually under way, and there is a lot of work being done to get the schemes ready. So I can assure you, we will have it all spent by the end of next year.

Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

MS O'GORMAN: Lorraine, you might come in just on the Bray side of the cliff walk as well.

MS GALLAGHER: Thanks, chief executive. And just to say that consultants have been appointed by the Bray MD to design and process for the installation of rock netting and rock bolts on the Bray side of the cliff walk.

Thank you.

MS O'GORMAN: Joe, do you want to come in on the housing?

MR LANE: Yes. The nomination process for Archers Wood and Hawkins, there are delays. Nomination by approved housing bodies is a little bit more challenging than our own process, because the allocation, there's a few extra little steps. One particular one is we have to contact the occupants and ask them are they interested, can we send -- under GDPR, can we send their details to the approved housing body, and then they go through their own process, and there's a few little delays there.

Also, we have quite a small allocation team and over the last six months to nine months they have attempted to allocate because have had very big delivery units while, at the same time, they also have other priorities, like homelessness, and particularly the notices to quit and trying to ensure that they have units going in, and now currently dealing with the housing needs. On saying that, that was another tranche gone to the approved housing body for that particular case. I think some of those are reallocations where the first people either didn't take it up or the approved housing body didn't nominate them. And we are meeting the group, the Tuath either this week or next week in that regard and that particular allocation process. So that might help in some regard. Okay. As regards Tinahask, yes, the Council is correct, there are two steps of units bought. Because we were a little bit behind with -- because of the Arklow School Scheme, we are now running two in the Tinahask area; one is the PPP and the other one is our own development. We are running both in parallel.

The -- or, as you said, number 3: when we put in for a bundle of five, when we were looking for applications, Tinahask was number 3 of that. However, it's in bundle 6, so it's number 1 of 6. So

there's -- because we are running five, and we have units in PPP bundle 5 and bundle 6. So it is in that one, and it is being progressed in that bundle, because the NDA, or the body dealing with the PPPs have appointed a design team for the part 8, and the initial master plan they are looking at is in the context of the densities and all that. So it might be in addition to the units we put in. I think we put in short of a hundred. We may get more in there. Our own one is circa 70, we are working through that. We will come back to the Wicklow area on that when we have -- sorry, to the Arklow municipal area, when we have the initial part 8 for our own done, and we will just provisionally put in where the other one actually leads to in that regard.

MS O'GORMAN: Leonora, you might come in. Thanks.

MS EARLS: Thank you. Councillor Cullen, yes, just in respect of the trees and the road safety. So a number of notices were signed last week and issued to landowners, instructing them to cut back their trees and that. So we will keep at that. We will engage with the district engineers in the next short while as well, and maybe have a discussion around that. And I will engage with the road safety officer as well, and maybe we can work out a campaign and tie it in with her road safety campaigns that she runs; so between the district engineers and the road safety officer, we will work on something and get it out there.

MS O'GORMAN: Thanks, Leonora. Just in relation to the community gardens and allotments. We did commit to doing a piece of work on it, and I sent a request out to the districts where every district was to look at what land was in our ownership that might be suitable for that. We are just kind of collating that information at the moment. There isn't a huge amount of land available that would be suitable for such an endeavour. So once we have that

final list compiled, we will bring it back to the members. At that point, what I would like to do is survey it out through our portal to see what level of demand there is for such schemes. And there's -- really, ideally, what I would like to do, if there is a demand for a community garden in any location, is to give that community garden over to the local community for them to look after it, rather than the Council be intermediary in it. That would be the desired outcome. But we would have to establish, I suppose, appropriate demands. So, in the process of doing that, we hopefully might have more of an update, I'd say, for the November meeting, and will bring something back to the members on that.

And just in relation to the Murrough, sorry, Councillor. Yes, we had anticipated work to be done on the ground in September. There seems to be a delay in Irish Rail, so we will get a more detailed note out to you. But in the meantime, we will talk amongst the district and see what we can do. I do fully appreciate how important a recreational facility and site it is to the people of Wicklow, and the weather we have had been having is not helping the situation. We will have a long-term solution to it, but what we can do in the interim, I will get a note out to the members in the next week on that.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, chief executive. Councillor Grace McManus.

COUNCILLOR MCMANUS: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just a point of clarification that I want to ask the chief executive. It was my understanding that we agreed that there would be an update on the youth homelessness strategy in the chief executive's report going forward. I didn't see it in this one. And I appreciate that it is also a national strategy. But there are targets that are going

to be delivered, or should be delivered in Quarter 4 of this year, and I think it would be very useful for us to monitor the implementation of that strategy going forward, particularly as the latest figures show 17% of national homeless figures are those aged 18 to 24. So if we can include that going forward, I would really appreciate it. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Tom Fortune.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, chief executive, for your report. Just a few general questions. The

NTA: Do the NTA dictate what local authorities can and can't do? In the same vein on that question, does the local authority actually report at this stage now in to the NTA?

On the second point: With the greenway that has been talked about for the last number of years, from Greystones to Arklow, I am sure the answer to this is no, but I want to just find out; is there funding in the local authority currently for any aspect of that, or -- you might just clarify that for me? You might also -- the fire service problems, are they now solved? You might give us an update on that.

And just coming back briefly to the HomeBond issue. The HomeBond issue has been discussed and discussed and discussed, and there's all kinds of people involved now. The problem is obviously HomeBond. So I would think at this stage the Minister or someone at his level has got to sit with the HomeBond owners, or whoever runs it, and just -- because it -- I am aware of one particular client, and the individual is almost having a nervous breakdown because of the way they are being handled, and I think it's disgraceful, and we just keep talking about it. So I think that needs to be dealt with more than urgently.

Just in this kind of semi-related way, the OPW -- are the OPW

talking to private landowners in regards to the leasing of land to try and alleviate the challenges that are out there with providing housing units for immigrants coming in?

Lastly then, the local area plans, can we get an update on that? what is the current latest of where we are in regards to local area plans? Because they have an impact, yes, and they have an impact obviously in the area I represent, so I would like to get a clear picture on that, please. Thank you

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Gerry O'Neill.

COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Cathaoirleach?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes. We can see you now, Gerry.

COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Can you see me? Can you hear me?

CATHAOIRLEACH: I can hear you and see you. Absolutely.

COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Hearing me is more important.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. I can do both. So go ahead.

COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Sorry about that, Cathaoirleach. Again, could I thank you and the CEO for the report.

Just a few things there I wanted to ask. On the housing situation of Blessington there, we have taken off in a big way, and there's a lot of houses in the pipeline. But a lot of houses already have been built. And I just want to ask about part 5 as regards Burgage Castle. There's 57 houses being built there at the moment. In actual fact, some are built and occupied. But just to get an update on our application within Burgage Castle. Also, on The Rectory on Kilbride Road, there's 46 houses there, social housing, and they would have been handed out probably six months ago, or more, and there's no sign of those yet. Can we get an update on the two of them?

Also, on the affordable housing, I was delighted to hear about

Baltinglass this morning, that the sod was turned there. But again, in Blessington, where we are in dire need for affordable housing, of all the houses - there's over 700 in the pipeline, or are being built - and there is not one affordable housing in Blessington. And there is a really -- a dire need for them here, because I am talking to people who suffered through the crash 12 or 14 years ago, and lost their house, but now are back on their feet and they would be in a position to, you know, start again, hopefully, you know. And so, I can't understand why it has to be a standalone affordable house estate, as such. You know, I can't -- why they can't be mingled in, like what is happening in Baltinglass, into existing planning applications, you know. And I would say developers would work along those lines, you know. But a lot of that, I think, is related to -- again, as I think your last speaker there asked for an update on the town plan. And our town plan is for four years out of date here in Blessington. And I'd love to know, you know, is there any plans to start this, our new plan?

The last one there. I don't expect the CEO to answer me on my final question, but I just -- I want to know maybe if we could get answers for the next meeting on the amount of councillors who are travelling abroad from the county. There seems to be a huge amount going out of the county there every year. Maybe for the last 12 months, there seems to be a lot of coming and going. And I mean, the public asks, you know, what is their property tax, where is it going and that. And I believe tomorrow now, there's another trip abroad to Amsterdam, where it's cycling there, learning how to cycle or whatever, I don't know what it is. But it's -- I think, in my view, that's a waste of public money. I can fully understand, absolutely fully understand why officials

might travel to these lands to see what way, you know, these cycle lanes are operated or whatever, but for councillors to be taken abroad -- I believe in the Wicklow Municipal District, they are notorious for the amount of trips abroad. So I would like to know -- I'd like to have an answer for our next meeting -- how many trips abroad are being carried out by councillors in the previous 12 months.

Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Tommy Annesley.

COUNCILLOR ANNESLEY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

First of all, before I start, I would like to thank the Arklow engineer and the Arklow director of services, Leonora. Two weeks ago, we had a building collapse on Lower Main Street, and it was a miracle. It fell at half past 2 in the day. Now, we all know what time kids go to school at, people walking up and down the street. So this building collapsed out onto the main street. Now, yes, there was a construction site beside the building, but that doesn't alleviate if, God forbid, if anyone had been killed. But, thank God, the building has been back up and the roads got back open. And very little fuss and -- and I won't say very little fuss. There was a number of traders seriously affected, but the bigger picture was, nobody was hurt.

So I actually waited last to come in here because I thought some other of my fellow councillors would have brought this up. I, as well as all my fellow councillors, have wrote in to the dereliction of buildings on the main street in Arklow. Now, when I say dereliction, there's no roofs on them. There two gable ends. They're sitting there. Now, we all know what the weather was like with the last gale force winds we're getting, and storms.

But that's what I -- the question I have now is: Are we monitoring these buildings, that are not derelict -- and just let me tell my fellow colleagues here why they are not derelict -- because they are -- they're all derelict. So they're not deemed to be derelict in a main street because they're not out of place. Now, what sort of answer is that to give anybody? These buildings are derelict. You can stand at the chapel grounds, at a funeral or a wedding, you look across the road, you see them. You go down the street a bit further, you see them. Now, this is a serious problem in Arklow. And I just want to know, what is this Council going to do about them now? Because I am sick writing in about them.

Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. Councillor Pat Kennedy, I'll just bring you in there as the final speaker.

COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And I won't be long, I promise you. I'm just wondering could we -- could I get an update at the next meeting, just in relation to the community land in Rathdrum. In fairness to Director Nicholson, I think he has provided funding to get a consultant brought on board. But it seems to be very slow moving forward, because I have contacted the relevant person and I don't seem to be able to get an answer on it, but there is a need for that land in Rathdrum to be opened up to the community. And I am just wondering could I get an update in the future or at the next meeting? I don't expect anybody to have an update today.

Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. Chief executive, I will hand it over to yourself.

MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Yes, Councillor McManus,

that homelessness, youth homelessness report will be in the next CE report.

In relation to the NTA, Councillor Fortune, they're the National Transport Authority. They're a state body. They are responsible for the public transport infrastructure in the country. We don't answer to them. We work with them. I think their parent department is the Department of Transport, and I suppose a lot of their goals are our goals; to improve accessibility and transport into the county. That's not to say we don't agree with everything that they do. But they certainly don't control what we do.

In relation to the OPW and private landowners for the beneficiaries of temporary protection, there is a general callout at the moment for anybody that has land to contact, you know, Jess and then they are put through the OPW to see if the land is suitable or not. Oftentimes, those sites get dealt with individually, and the Council are kind of the last to hear of it. If they come through the Council, it's a different process, you know. So there is certainly an avenue for landowners to go directly to the Department if they want to give their land for the use of beneficiaries of temporary protection.

I might bring Breege in on the LAPs and the update on those, and then I will get Joe to come in on housing. On dereliction in Arklow, Leonora might come in on that. And we will come back to you, Councillor Kennedy, on community land in Rathdrum, certainly. And I might get -- Lorraine might deal with the councillors traveling abroad. I'd say that might be a matter of protocol. But there might -- Leonora might be able to give a bit of information on the current visit as well.

Thank you.

MS KILKENNY: work has actually commenced on the preparation of

three local area plans; the Wicklow town, Rathnew, the Greystones Delgany and Kilcoole plan, and Blessington. There is a statutory process in place in terms of data gathering and consultation. So the team are at the data gathering and surveying stage for all three plans, and, at the present, they are in -- you know, preparing on online consultation and portal, the pre-draft consultations for the Greystones, Delgany and Kilcoole plan, as well as the Blessington plan.

As you know, for the Wicklow town plan -- Wicklow town and Rathnew plan, that pre-draft consultation came to an end there on the 28th of September, so those submissions will then be dealt with in progressing that plan.

And then the current LAPs for the three settlements, as well as the Arklow LAP and Bray, you know, they can be viewed on our website and the current status in relation to those. Okay?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Joe.

MR LANE: As regards Burgage Castle, they are currently in negotiations. We are just finalising negotiations with those, that is a calculation, a statutory requirement, a statutory calculation when we are purchasing price, there's a way to work out how much they're to be sold as. To the best of my knowledge, they are currently being -- that negotiation is working through. The Rectory, as people know, that's a subject to contract between the approved housing body and the developer. However, like all approved housing bodies, we take an active involvement and interest in it.

My understanding is that there is still finalisation over -- either last week or this week, as regards the Irish water connection, and there's a number of little things to just finalise there, inspections, paperwork. If that is complete, there's minor

repairs then to the road and footpath; that will have to wait until the final connection, assuming that the Irish water issue is resolved and finalised.

And then the current deadline is either -- is supposed to be at the end of this September or start of this month, give or take. So I can give progress. If there is a delay in the next couple of weeks, I will get back to you, but my understanding is that that should be closed within the next few days. That is the Burgage. There is another email regarding the form.

Just as regards affordable in general. Again, the First Homes is still out there and that's an arrangement between the developer and the person purchasing it, and that can be available in all private estates. We will be running an ad again as regards affordable; the one in Baltinglass that people mentioned and the one they -- the one in Baltinglass was one where an ad came in last time out, and we worked for -- we worked with the developer, and we worked with a number of other developers regarding -- and our own development in Lough Lane, regarding any HF application. So that's how it is done, and people apply.

The other scheme, the PPP bundle 3 in Blessington doesn't allow for affordable. PPPs and the bundle 5s in Rehill and Burnaby, the model itself doesn't allow for affordables. However - and I might circulate it again for the next meeting just a small thing - as time goes on there is more part 5s, so it will be subject to 20%. Again, it is quite a difficult process to decide when exactly houses were purchased, and whether 10% or 20% applies. But as more applications are coming in, more developments are subject to the 20% between affordable and social. So they'll start coming through in the next couple of years.

As regards -- just bear with me a second because I have an email

there regarding the older -- the young person. Yes. That should have been on the agenda, and we will have it on the agenda next month. However, there is not anything being done on it, because... It will be on it from now on. It appears on the item on the housing homeless forum. It will be included in the new homeless action plan which is currently being worked on. On top of that, there is a national homeless forum; it's part of that, and wicklow will be guided on that. The wicklow ... is a member of that. So it's being dealt with. It's just maybe we should do a little bit more the informing.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Next, Leon ara.

MS EARLS: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Councillor Fortune, yes, we did get funding for the Greystones-Wicklow Greenway this year. So TII are now the funding agency. So we got 250,000, and that is to progress the environmental reports and progress in to Phase -- through Phase 2, which is the options report and options selection.

In relation to the fire service, the national dispute was resolved when the firefighters accepted the proposal from the WRC. So, we are just kind of working through the detail of that at the moment, and waiting for the circular from the Department. So we will start implementing the provisions of that agreement.

Councillor O'Neill, the trip to Holland tomorrow is fully funded by the NTA. There is no funding from Wicklow County Council. And I would argue that it is more important that the councillors are on it than the officials, because it gives a really good understanding and feedback to the elected members, so they can see how it is done, and, like, why we are moving forwards pedestrian and cycle ways; but, as I said, there's no funding from Wicklow County Council. It is fully funded by the NTA.

Councillor Kennedy, in relation to buildings on the main street, so Arklow was successful under the last call of the RDF. So the town regeneration officer is working on kind of progressing some of those premises on the main street. But we can continue to work with ourselves and planning on other buildings. So we will keep an eye on that, and we will work with you on it

COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Lorraine, do you want to come in there?

MS GALLAGHER: Yes. Just in relation to elected members' foreign travel, in general. Foreign travel normally would just consist of twinning trips, where we have strong twinning relationships with other communities, and St. Patrick's Day attendance by elected members. By regulation, they should either go before the Council or an appropriate committee, and in Wicklow County Council's instance, it comes before the protocol committee. So all trips or twinning trips, et cetera, are approved by the protocol committee. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Lorraine, and thank you members for that. We will move on to the next item on the agenda. That is: "To receive a presentation on the Draft Climate Action Plan 2024-2029. And Breege Kilkenny and Mark Costello will be doing that. So it is 15:05 now. So at 15:15, Mark, I am going to be calling -- and Breege, if that is okay.

MS KILKENNY: Can I just put a stop on the clock for a moment? Because we didn't answer the question for Councillor Annesley in relation to the derelict site.

Last year, Councillor Annesley, we had the team go down to the Arklow municipal district and went through in detail, you know, where the legislation is in terms of derelict sites and dangerous structures, and, at that time, the team actually committed to take

on any of the queries associated with the members. So if we have an unsatisfactory answer, maybe you could just give us the details of those and we will get back to you. Okay?

CATHAOIRLEACH: That is great. Well done, Breege. Thank you very much.

MS KILKENNY: Are you checking the time now again?

CATHAOIRLEACH: I am checking the time now. It is 15:06.

MS KILKENNY: All right. I will go rapidly through this.

Good afternoon, members. I would just like to say a few words with regards to our Wicklow County Council's first Climate Action Plan 2024-2029. Along with the County Development Plan, this is one of our most important strategic plans to be adopted by you as the members, and hopefully we will be in a position to bring it to you for adoption before the end of the year.

As Mark will outline to you, this first draft will be placed on public display from tomorrow, 3rd October, to 15th November for public consultation.

The draft plan and the objectives have already been presented to both the climate action and biodiversity SPC, as well as the planning SPC, and I want to thank the chairs of both of those SPCs, both in terms of their contribution and encouragement for engagement by the wider public.

We are anxious to bring the plan to the attention of all members here today before it goes on public display. I urge all of you, as elected members, to familiarise yourself in terms of the actions and the objectives that are included in the draft plan. They have been set out under five main themes, and Mark will go through for you, and also, we have a separate section for Arklow, as Wicklow's first decarbonisation zone.

I also just want to acknowledge and thank the climate action team

with regard to their Trojan work and the approach which they've taken to preparing this plan. This plan is very much prepared as a bottom-up, with no pen put to paper with regard to any objectives or actions until the stakeholder engagement was complete. And then it was the information from the stakeholder workshops, presentations, information evenings that have formed the objectives and actions that are before you.

So one final thing I want to say is that, in all my time here in Wicklow County Council, I have never seen the level of consultation and engagement with and by the public and the communities of County Wicklow as has been observed in relation to this draft plan. The executives had enthusiastic engagement from all sectors, both internally across our directors within the Council, and externally, all sectors of the community of Wicklow County Council, from young and old, businesses, entrepreneurs, tourism, fishermen and farmers.

And the final thing I would like to highlight and acknowledge, the motivation and level of engagement by the farming community of County Wicklow in this process, and their commitment and willingness to do what they can and play their part in addressing climate issues facing this -- not just this county, but for the country.

So now I will hand you over to Mark for the next few minutes we have.

MR COSTELLO: Thank you, Breege. Just to introduce myself. My name is Mark Costello. I am the climate action coordinator for Wicklow County Council. It is an absolute pleasure to live and work in County Wicklow. It is a beautiful county, and I am privileged to live here.

The first thing I would like to mention is the effects of climate

change are well-known. All you have to do is turn on your TV or radio station. I can't remember a news programme where it hasn't featured.

When I think of climate change, I think of the future, I think of what world I am leaving my kids, and so on. So that is my concern about climate change. That is why I have a strong interest in it. So just in relation to the first slide.

It outlines kind of how climate change comes from legislation and policy, from the EU through the European Union, down to Ireland. It comes the whole way down to local authorities, through the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Amendment Act, where each local authority is statutory required to have a Climate Action Plan.

So just the next slide, please.

So Breege mentioned stakeholder engagement. It has been vast. We have to take into account the County Council Development Plan, the National Climate Action Plan, which has roughly about 38 actions that was considered, and are featured within our Climate Action Plan. We have to take into account national planning and policy, such as the Dart Plus, BusConnects, and so on. Plans for the NTA, and so on.

So I will move on to the next slide, if that is okay.

The internal stakeholder engagement was vast amongst all the different sections in the local authority. We agreed to different actions with the various sections. We met at every level in the local authority, and with all the sections. The external stakeholder engagement as well. We met with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. We took into account the opinions of the youth, and actions requested by the youth, Law Pro, the IFA. So the stakeholder engagement was vast, including third-level

institutions.

I might move on to the next slide.

So the Climate Action Plan is based on the local authority Climate Action Plan guidelines, which basically outlines the various chapters and that that each local authority must contain. I am not going to go through the entire Climate Action Plan. This is just a summary document. Our Climate Action Plan itself has 120 actions for the county and 24 actions for the Arklow DZ.

I might move to the next slide, please.

So the scope of the actions. So full accountability. The local authority is going to be -- basically, has to track and report on how we are delivering a reduction of emissions and helping to build resilience on the negative impacts of climate change within the county. We have to influence sectors such as business, communities and individuals in the delivery of local climate action. We have to coordinate and facilitate and bring together the key stakeholders, and delivery a climate action within the county, and advocate by raising awareness on climate-related issues and responses.

I might move to the next slide. Thank you. Okay. I think we might have missed one there. Okay.

So just a brief overview of the actions. As I mentioned, so, in total, there's 144 actions, when you consider the DZ plus the county plan. Actions will be monitored and reviewed annually; even quarterly at SPC level. The actions will prioritise the core work for the Council in relation to climate change. Further measures can be updated and added during the process of the plan. The main obstacle for all local authorities is funding and staff resources. And as we all know, the effects of climate change can be reduced the quicker we take the actions. So the quicker it is

funded, the actions are funded, the more of an impact we can have within the five years.

wicklow -- what came across in the stakeholder engagement is wicklow County Council are already doing a lot of positive work in relation to climate action, and it is my belief that the Climate Action Plan will help the various sections of wicklow County Council, not just get recognition for the work they're doing, but will encourage them to do more.

I might move to the next slide.

Under governance and leadership, there's 16 actions. A lot of this particular team is based on communication and making sure climate action is delivered through the management team, a new climate action committee, which is roughly senior engineer level, senior executive officer level, training and policy for staff and elected members. Additionally, wicklow County Council will lead the mid east energy unit, and we are hoping to achieve accreditation for energy management, where all our buildings will be reviewed.

I might move to the next slide, please.

Next is the Built Environment and Transport. These are the main actions from the plan, such as the significant energy use buildings, such as our leisure centres, the Bray Fire Service Station, and the County Buildings. From housing, you have the Housing Retrofit Programme, plus all capital projects, of course, will not only be taken into account, part L compliance, so your BER ratings, but also, low carbon construction methods now are also being taken into account. We have our public lighting, which has been updated to LEDs. Active travel; BusConnects, Dart Plus, and so on.

I will move to the next slide, if that is okay. Thank you.

The Natural Environment and Green Infrastructure has 31 actions, such as coastal erosion, so -- which Irish Rail as well are involved as a partner. You have the likes of Brittas Bay and other dunes that we have to be careful of. We have our Flood Relief Scheme, such as Arklow, which was already mentioned earlier. We also have Avoca, Baltinglass. We are going to have a new SUDs policy, which will take into account the water quality as well as storm water management going forward in the county. We will be looking at a hill and forest fire management response and strategy, and look to implement a dark sky reserve and a light assessment of Laragh and Roundwood.

If we move to the next. Thank you.

Then we have communities' resilience in transition, which is 25 actions. This is the new community climate action fund which the local authority will have. It's 646,000 different communities, such as Tidy Towns and SECs can apply for various schemes throughout the Council. So we would encourage any local communities' groups to seek funding here. We are going to develop an events policy and develop and implement climate change events on an annual basis, such as climate action week and a sustainable development goals week. We are going to work more with the youth, promote green schools. There is also a GAA green club programme which we are going to seek to roll out to different GAA clubs and promote in the county.

I might move to the next slide, please.

Next is sustainability and resource management. So there's 21 actions here. One of them is, we are going to complete a review of the civic community sites within the Council. We are going to look at -- we are going to promote an uptake of energy performance measures in business and agricultural sectors. A renewables hub

at the Wicklow campus in Clermont. We are going to liaise with Signpost, ACRES and TAMS to promote climate action in the agriculture sector, and we are going to promote green public procurement more within the local authority. We are also going to look at former landfill sites, such as Ballymurtagh and Rampere for the development of possibly green energy uses. So whether that is solar development or that. We are going to review some of the existing work practices in the Council, to promote climate change and see what we can do more.

If we move to the next slide, please.

So the Arklow DZ itself. The Arklow DZ was selected by the Council. There's three major projects going to be happening in Arklow. You have the Flood Defence Scheme, the Waste Water Treatment Plan, which is under construction, and the Offshore Arklow Wind Bank, possibly. We are going to look to put in a shared travel scheme within Arklow. We are going to look to retrofit the civic amenity site to include for solar PVs on same. We are going to support the work of the Arklow SEC. We will be looking at tree surveys, and promote the development of the circular economy, including waste minimisation.

If we move to the next slide, please.

The timeframe for the completion of the plan. So as Breege has mentioned, it has already gone, at draft stage, before two SPCs. It has gone in front of a senior management team as well. Public consultation is starting tomorrow in relation to the draft plan. It will be located in hard copies in a number of libraries throughout the Council, and the end of public consultation is the 15th November. We are also going to be doing drop-in clinics, when members of the Climate Action Team will go out to the different districts, where people are more than welcome to come

into the libraries to talk to the Climate Action Team.

That concludes the presentation. I would like to thank you for your time.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Mark. And thank you for only being four minutes over. So well done. It's much appreciated. So I am going to open up to the floor, and I know Councillor Lourda Scott had already indicated. So we might stop sharing. You can't? Absolutely no problem. Councillor Lourda Scott, can you hear us there?

COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Yes.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We can hear you fine. We just can't see you. So do you want to go ahead?

COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Okay, that's grand. I'll speak incognito. Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks, Mark and Breege, for the presentation. I just want to compliment the Climate Action Team as a whole on this very thorough and extensive Climate Action Plan. Our SEC, which I chair, have been working along with the Climate Action team. We have adjusted the times of our meetings to kind of coincide with key date targets for the stages of the report, and we were delighted to be presented with the draft actions at our SPC meeting recently.

I've read through each of the 142 actions in detail. There is a huge amount of work in it. I can't emphasise enough how much work has gone into presenting this report. And I see actions reflecting discussions from the entire term of our SPC. I see actions reflecting the really active engagement from all members of our SPC, and I have to just compliment all of the SPC members as well, particularly our PPN reps, who have been just very active, very engaging from all the different stakeholders. And I would say, when we were presented with the draft action

recently, it was probably the first time we've had any draft policy or report in our SPC where we actually had very few suggestions to add to it, and I say that as a testament to how much work had already gone in before we had received it. And again, I think that is reflected the really thorough, thorough consultation process that was done as well. I often say it here, that members of the public are consulted out, and it is hard to engage them. But I think a really, really special effort was put in to engage members across all sectors of society, and I will just say well done on that, and we can see that again come through in the actions.

I specifically want to mention the youth voice, which Mark referred to, particularly because last week I welcomed in Wicklow -- actually, it was in Greystones, two Wicklow members of the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity to present their report to the chief executive, and it was really heartening to be able to speak to them and tell them that some their actions that that group had worked on have already been included into our climate action plan.

And so, I just want to conclude by saying, echoing what Breege said, I want to encourage everybody here, every member here to read this report and to circulate the details of the consultation to their network. This isn't just for, you know, the people that are interested in biodiversity entirely. This is for everyone across the board. It is for people on housing SPC, it's for farmers, members of the IFA, everybody. Send it out to all your networks and encourage them to, you know, look at the bits that they are interested in and put their opinion back to the Council during this consultation period.

It is a document that really does straddle across every section of

the Council, and I am delighted to be able to say that. It's unusual that a document does that, but this really does. It's not going to sit in the silo of the Climate Action team. It is going to be used everywhere.

I will just finally say, I just have one ask -- I have already said this to Mark. I want to underpin the importance of having this document is written in plain English in line with the NALA requirement, and I know we have a presentation from this community later on, but it's really, really important that this is accessible to all. There is a lot of language in it, there's a lot of detailed actions in it but we want to be able for anybody to pick up, read and understand and be able to input. And I look forward to seeing the comments that will come back in from the public consultation.

So thanks very much.

CATHAOIRLEACH: That is fantastic. Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, Mark and Breege, for their reports.

As a member of the -- of that SPC, again, I just want to add a layer of recognition. I think it is worth acknowledging, even as you present, you know, you can tell you believe in it. And like, you know, it's -- people can go through the motions on content, and we can write reports. I want it to be recognised as well that a report like this, it's unprecedented because it hasn't been done before.

So we -- there's no copy and paste option. There's no, do it the way we did it before option. You can't just pull a version of it from somewhere else. So this has been constructed, and I would say co-constructed, which, again, is a huge, huge strength, and I

just really think that should be recognised.

This isn't a report for a shelf. And I think that challenges all of us. And I think that has been said by both of you, and by Councillor Scott, that this -- we could -- you know, if we ignore it at our peril, it is that important. And I really think that the landscape of this stuff, a new SPC, new staff, new roles, new landscape, new obligations, new expectations; and within all of that, there's fear around a future, young people who have climate anxiety that, again, we have never, never had to have those conversations before.

So I just want to give recognition to a plan that will challenge us where we won't be able to hide, Cathaoirleach, that we won't be able to sit back and let someone else do the work. And I think the strength of it -- and the last thing I will say -- is the strength of it is in how it's invited people all along the way to get involved; lean on experts in the community, invite young people to share their views, and harness the energy of people who are transitioning with this.

For example, as Breege said, the farming community. I -- and I genuinely hope that this is an issue on the doorsteps, when people get into LE '24, and that the people of the county make demands of us, as elected reps, or anyone who is campaigning or looking to come back here next year, alongside those who are in positions of -- important positions within the local authority.

Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

Councillor Gerry Walsh.

COUNCILLOR WALSH: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks, Mark, for the presentation. This is a wonderful piece of work. Well done. And it is obvious from the presentation that, you know, the

planner, the draft plans that is now -- it is evidence-based, robust, it's had, you know, broad stakeholder engagement and input, and it is practical and it is actions and results-focused. So, you know, it is all about working together, really, in cooperation to make this plan realistic. I welcome the piece there, the community piece, in relation to resilience and transmission on the community forum. Because for, again, this to work, and us as politicians, you know, we need to bring our citizens with us on board.

I attended an Encore environmental conference there with the EMRA group, that's the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly only last week, and, you know, most interesting -- and, you know, the message coming from that was loud and clear, and it said, you know, the climate bomb is ticking but the window of opportunity is still open.

I mean, the evidence is all around us. We have had, you know, with extreme weather events, the loss of biodiversity, et cetera, et cetera. So look it, it's time now for action. And well done on this plan today.

Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Peir Leonard.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Yes. I would just also like to thank the whole team. It's actually a lovely committee. Everybody is really nice and enthusiastic on it. It works really well. All the representatives from the PPN and staff have done tremendous work.

I would just like to, I suppose -- I am not going to go over everything that Dermot and Lourda have said, but just to encourage all the other members here. We all have a platform of people that

listen to us, and I think, if we can encourage all of the members to kind of really read this document and be the ambassadors for this plan in our local communities and try and double and triple the great response that we had to the initial plan, and get the draft out there, and just engage and get by, that's what will make the difference.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Mary Kavanagh.

COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Thanks, chair. I just have a -- it is an issue that keeps raising its head. Thanks, Mark, for the presentation. It was very interesting. It is to do with the use of glyphosates throughout the county. Now, I know that there has been a ban on glyphosates. The problem is that it is leading to a lot of discontent. Now, I personally am for the ban.

I am very keen, very passionate about biodiversity, and always have been. But the problem is that a lot of people aren't, and they see that, without the use of glycosides, that there is a huge weed problem around towns and villages, and the cost of removing them another way is proving to be very, very expensive, if not prohibitive. And there have been things muted like foam string, which apparently isn't all it's cracked up to be.

So I am just wondering are there any herbicides which are not glyphosate-based, which don't harm the pollinators, which could be used to remove, we'll say, unsightly areas. I'm not talking about, you know, large swathes of, you know, dandelions or other kind of pollinating plants; I'm talking about along roadside verges, along footpaths, things that people look at and they say, this shows our town in a very bad light.

I am just wondering, is there any work that the climate SPC could do in conjunction with the biodiversity officer to try and come up

with a reasonably-priced suitable alternative that will address that problem and satisfy everybody, so it won't harm our pollinators, but it will get rid of, you know, the messy look that there are around towns, and have been for the last year or so. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

Mark, do you want to come in on any of those comments, or the final one at all, Breege?

MS KILKENNY: Just to address Councillor Kavanagh there. We have been working in the background in relation to the districts and through our director of services of transportation, you know, who works with the district engineer, is coming back to look at the problems that they are encountering. That is something that we will bring to the SPC for discussion. It is not specifically related to the plan here today. It is an important aspect, I will grant you that, but that we need to bring it back to the SPC as just maybe one of our items. And anything that is coming out of that, you know, if it links into the plan, we will do so. But it is a very specific issue that we are actually dealing with.

CATHAOIRLEACH: That is great. Thanks. Mark, do you want to comment at all? Are you okay?

MR COSTELLO: Yes. Just in relation to that as well, there is an action in the action plan just solely in relation to that policy, where we are going to look to implement it within internal local authority structures, such as the districts, and we are going to work with other local authorities to try to identify the best practice and how we can improve this here. So it is an action. We don't have -- I don't have any answers today. But it is an action to get answers, so we can come back to you in future. So thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thanks very much, Mark. Before I bring the chief executive in. Just myself, just to thank you both for today's presentation and thank the SPC for all the work that has been done on this. I don't know if it was Dermot or Lourda, I can't remember who said it, but it is very, very clear that you are very passionate about that, and that comes across, and it is very much appreciated.

So I will just hand you over to the chief executive.

MS O'GORMAN: Yes. Just to reiterate, I suppose, the sentiment of the SPC. I think, for me, this has been really enlightening. The team are so engaged with the members of the SPC, with all of the staff in the organisation. It is a hugely, hugely important policy document for this local authority. As Breege said, probably second only to the development plan in terms of its weight of importance.

It is, you know -- it's the emergency we're dealing with now and how this local authority is going to be the exemplar and the leader in this space. So I just really want to express my thanks to Mark and Breege and all the team. They are, I have to say, champions for all that is in that plan. I have never met a group so passionate, and along with the SPC members as well, it is fantastic to see such buy in to a plan.

And again, I would encourage you to make this plan known to your own constituents and stakeholders. There has been massive consultation up to now, but now, I suppose, it is time for the public to have their say on the plan, too, which is hugely, hugely important.

So we welcome the feedback that we will get in the coming weeks. We expect it to be fairly weighty, I would imagine. It is the one piece of public consultation where people aren't tired of. You

know, there is definitely an interest in this area, particularly from the young people.

And I have to say again, when we met with the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity last week, it was just wonderful to see how many of their actions are replicated in our plan. So, you know, we're hearing their voice. They are the next generation, and the generation beyond them, that are going to have to deal with our actions. So, I suppose, we have to act responsibly.

I just want to thank again the team for their effort to date, and the SPC on what is a really wonderful draft plan.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mark.

Members, we will move on to the next item which is: "To consider and approve the County Wicklow Local Economic & Community Plan 2023 to 2029."

So Michael Nicholson and Deirdre Whitfield will be covering this item. And as per the last speakers, Deirdre, you will have ten minutes. So if you could keep to that, that would be much appreciated.

Thank you.

MR NICHOLSON: Just while Deirdre is getting set up. This replaces the County's first LECP, which lasted for the last six years, and this will last for the next six years. But the change in this plan, there will be an implementation plan which can be reviewed after two years, just in case there's been some change. The plan was developed by the Enterprise and Corporate Services, SPC, and their staff under chairmanship of Councillor Tom Fortune, and by the LCDC under the chairmanship of Councillor Pat Kennedy, who looked after the community elements.

It was also overseen by the LECP Advisory State Group, which consists of members from both... It has been presented to the five MDs. It has been presented to the LCDC. It has been passed by the Corporate Services SPC and it has been passed by East Midlands Regional Assembly, as required to do by law. And now it is before you, finally, hopefully, for final approval.

So Deirdre is going to make the presentation.

Thank you very much for your attention.

MS WHITFIELD: Thank you very much, Michael. I am going to be quick. I am not going to go through the detail of the plan, the objectives, et cetera, because we have been through, as Michael said, the five municipal districts for consideration, and so you have been through that process, so we will save you going through it again.

I am just going to highlight certain parts of it because, today, we are here to present this to you, because the guidelines say that the LECP framework should be presented to the local authority for approval. "In line with the Act, any amendments recommended by the local authority should relate solely to the requirements for the LECP to be consistent with the local City or County Development Plan and the RSCS. So that is the purpose of today. As Michael said, it was presented to EMRA on the 8th September 2023. It has been through the five Municipal Districts, and EMRA made a statement of consistency and agreed on it, but, subject to a number of very few recommendations, which were really about stating more specifically that the LECP is consistent with the core strategy of the County Development Plan, and about making specific reference to the designation of towns in the county, and to aligning it with the sustainability goal.

So that was their recommendation. And on foot of that, they have

agreed that it is in line with the RSCS.

As I say, I am not going to go through the detail of the plan, because -- unless you really want me to, because we have been through it already at each MD level. But, as you know, I -- as it was said before, I always find it is always good to say what the LECP is again.

So it is that funnel -- the LECP is that funnel that shapes national policies into a local context, and that is the importance, really, of the LECP; is that it gives a wicklow context to plans and programmes and strategies, and -- you know, instead of a one-size-fits-all nationally. And I suppose that is its importance, really.

And because of that, and because it is in a plan, and because it is monitored, it gives a more strategic approach to the delivery of services.

And we can move on.

A more strategic approach. It gives more effective planning. And there's loads of examples of that. For instance, in the last plan, Youth Service of the KWETB noticed gaps in service delivery. They went to the Children and Young People's Services Committee, which then goes -- went to the LCDC and the LECP, and, as a result of that, new services were brought in.

So it is about where the -- when it is seen in the plan, it is where we can add value to existing services, not just replicating existing services, and where we can identify gaps and go and fill them as much as we can.

It better harnesses expertise and capabilities of local services and actors, and it secures improved targeting of resources and delivery of bespoke solutions.

Again, going over the last plan, that has happened numerous times,

where agencies have combined resources, and both monetary and capital, to improve service delivery.

And so, as a result of that, there should be greater accountability and transparency in decision making. We are answerable to so many bodies. There are decisions based on local priorities, as I said, improve local participation and decision making, again, combining resources and improving services for the county.

So that is just a reminder of what the LECP is and what its benefits are and why it is worth doing and why it is worth sticking with.

What I do want to emphasise is that the -- to assure you that there has been such a robust process for developing this plan, that you can be assured that it is okay and we can stand over it. So as they are the stages that we went through to develop the plan, and I know I have been through that before with you, so I am going to go over this very quickly.

We had online surveys. Then we had -- we went out to the five Municipal District areas, and we consulted with the public there. We piggybacked on events like the social inclusion women's network women's day event, like the chief executive breakfast briefing, and the Comhairle na nÓg summit, which was great, because we could do that and get the feedback from there.

We were one of the first counties out of trap to start this process, and could have finished a lot earlier, but the advisory group decided to put the time in, not into rushing to finish it, but to put the extra time that we then had in, to extending the consultation. So we went back out to the five MD areas with what we had, had very robust conversations with them, got more feedback.

We got -- it was time, too, to have very robust conversations and good input from the SPC, the economic SPC, and the LCDC, and they were absolutely brilliant. We had such massive engagement from them. Especially the economic SPC. And they challenged us all the way to make sure that this plan was as good as it could be. We also, because of that, had the time to engage in the pilot project, funded by PUBL for a deeper dive into engagement with -- with those who are normally marginalised from this process. And there was huge learning. We got a huge learning out of that. We learned that there is such a huge disconnect sometimes between consultation and policies, especially from those who are usually excluded from this process, or feel excluded from this process, who are disadvantaged, who are dealing with -- they told us they are dealing with things such as the cost of living crisis, day-to-day living, and in general, you know to be sort of not interested in a six-year plan, and why would they anyway. And that really is the feedback that we heard from that.

And it was a really, really good wake-up call. And because of that, we put together a social inclusion network group, under CCNSD, and that group was going to meet from time to time, and it will meet regularly, and it will monitor the plan, and it will make sure that the voices of those who aren't normally heard will be heard throughout the implementation of the plan, which is very valuable, which is time well spent in developing the plan.

So the next bit is -- or the next few slides are the objectives, and I can say, I'm just going to skip over them. I won't go through them again, because, as I say, you have had them already. But I am going to say what the next steps for the LECF is.

So after following this, we have to make an implementation plan. In fact, we are 80, 90% through that process. And that will give

us the timeframes, the measuring, and it will give us the mechanism for monitoring the plan, the implementation of the plan. And that's done by the advisory group, which meets quarterly, and the economic and enterprise development SPC, and the Local Community Development Committee.

And I assure you that every single action is gone through thoroughly at these meetings and/or questioned or revised or moved on or helped or supported, or whatever is needed.

We will be connecting it, as I say, with sustainable development goals, screening it as part of the Public Sector Duty Act, and the implementation plan then is reviewed and developed every two years.

So it has been a robust process. Going forward, the implementation is going to be a very robust process, and I suppose that is what I want to leave you with today: The assurance that both of those things have happened and will happen.

So thank you very much

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Deirdre. Eight minutes.

Very, very impressive. I think you had an advantage, though, having been around to us all, which is also very much appreciated as well.

So I am just going to open that up to the floor there.

Councillor John Mullen. I am also looking for a proposer and a seconder, so if any of the speakers wish to take on that role, just let me know. Councillor John Mullen.

COUNCILLOR MULLEN: Cathaoirleach, now that you have asked, I would find it an honour to propose this report, and, first of all, I would like to thank the team at CCSD and LECF for the years of work that they have put into this. This document is as important as the County Development Plan. It doesn't get the same

attention, it doesn't get the special meetings that will go on for hours and hours and hours, but it is as important, because it is about the economic and community development of our county. And it is an extraordinary document, and I think anybody who has time to read even chapter 4, which is the economic and demographic profile of the county and the directions in which it is going, it is an essential piece of work to be read by every councillor, every community and voluntary worker, every senior executive member, because there's some extraordinary facts that probably wouldn't be known by most people, particularly in the area of deprivation, where the Arklow Municipal District and my own Municipal District in Baltinglass are the areas that are in need of attention, because the divide has become very much a north/south divide, not an east/west divide, and where the impact of the greater Dublin area has -- in the north of the county has brought increased prosperity and challenges, the lack of that economic and social development in the south of the county and in the southwest of the county has the opposite effect.

And there are even lines in here where County Wicklow's population is urbanising, but continue to urbanising, and some parts of southwest Wicklow are vulnerable to depopulation; depopulation on an east coast basis.

That is why I really do thank you for bringing those facts to bear. They are data-proven facts. They are facts that are known to every local representative in the area anyway. I hope the actions are implemented and monitored. I like the two-year review. But I would also suggest that what frustrates me as a first-time local councillor is that, our LECP plan and our County Development Plan, two different departments run them, and two different departments necessarily mightn't cooperate in the

delivery of the other.

So when it comes to planning for rural regenerative tourism, which is a game changer for the rural areas of southwest Wicklow, and, in the economic development of, say, our largest town, Arklow, in the south of the county, our planning department has to realise that it has a very positive role to play in facilitating economic development rather than preventing economic development, when it comes to regenerative tourism and various industrial sites we have, and housing.

Areas are being depopulated because housing is extraordinarily difficult in southwest Wicklow, getting planning. So I do think our two plans need to be more aligned in delivery, and where there is not delivery, we need to point that out; because, on the one hand, this is a fantastic document in outlining the challenges and the actions and the priorities we need to go, but the reality of trying to set up a tourism-related business or an economic business or a housing estate in our part of the county is there on record as well, and I would just like to -- I think that needs to be put on the record.

But it is an extraordinary document. I'm delighted to propose it. I hope it is monitored and followed as closely as our County Development Plan normally is, and we can see them both aligning in ambition and delivery in the next few years.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Peir Leonard.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Yes, I would absolutely concur with Councillor Mullen's view on it. I suppose, for me, it's in writing, what we see on the ground in our communities, and sometimes people think that we imagine things, or we imagine

things are so bad.

But, for me, what -- like, I mean, I went through the LECP, and it just struck me, like, on record that, you know, sort of Arklow, you know, the town appears on -- in numerous parts of it as being the lowest disadvantaged town in the county.

My question is just, how does that translate into the Capital Investment Plan for the county and the budget for the county when investment is needed? We have no -- very little community spaces down there. We have businesses closing by the second. We lost three businesses last month, closed their doors down there. Very soon, we will have absolutely nothing on the main street. That means people have nowhere to meet. They have nowhere to congregate.

You know, if they are not into sports or they don't have kids, they have absolutely -- the library is the only place, and the library -- I have to say, the library is a fantastic space, but, other than that, we are really deprived, and that translates into ill health and depression and physical ill health, when people can't connect.

So I just -- I suppose, we need investment down there and we need a plan for these areas. And we have the evidence here in the LECP. So the implementation plan will be key, I think, to hope, to see these communities regenerated in the next few years.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I won't repeat some of the stuff said by my colleagues.

But again, actually, in kind of contrast to the Climate Action Plan, I think the LECP brings a huge amount of institutional

knowledge on its journey towards a new plan. And even, I know that this plan, there was a shift in the how of it, and how it might look, and kind of a redefinition of how it would prioritise. But I think what it did, which is a strength, was both internally, within CCSD, and people like Deirdre, bring institutional knowledge, which is critical, but they also invite people to come together, who we all meet in our communities and know carry such a huge amount of knowledge, expertise, experience, insight, and to bring them and have them around tables with directors and with staff and say, well, what's the need here, and how are we going to respond to it?

And I felt I have lots of ins into LECP, with all the different identities that I struggle with. So it was really a pleasure for me to be able to see that it wanted input from all the relevant spaces. And some of the highlights for me is that the social inclusion network coming out of that, and that is again to recognise that things can emerge from a process, and when they emerge in a way that people are able to say, actually, that is important, we need to have a social inclusion network, because it will serve us as the plan is delivered, and as it tries to respond to some of the challenges that colleagues have outlined; and I think that is a huge, huge strength.

And when people are willing to be on a social inclusion network from the sectors, give their time, give their energy, want to share their views, then that also shows that there is a sincerity around that invitation.

And the last thing I would say is that I think it's critical, again, that we -- the new landscape of an LECP holds the public sector duty obligations, hold the SDG obligations with it, and I think very much challenges us, once again, to accountability,

transparency, improve local participation in decision-making; they're lofty goals, and I think for us to sincerely tackle them and take them on and hold them as valuable will be the testament, I think, to the journey of the new LECP.

Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

Councillor Vincent Blake.

COUNCILLOR BLAKE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks for the presentation as well. It definitely very well put together and very well developed over a long period of time as well. We did have a presentation to our district, and we very much welcome that allocation as well.

I would just like to refer to page 7 of it, which talks about our rural future and rural development policy '21 to '25. I think it is a very worthwhile comment in terms of what rural Wicklow should look like, and rural Ireland as well. But I think it's not being reflected in the planning.

It talks about people wanting to live in rural County Wicklow, it talks about development of working in vibrant rural places as well. It doesn't reflect what is actually happening out there on the ground. Planning refusals being refused on a regular basis. Industrial sites being dezoned in the County Development Plan. So these things are not being worked into the County Development Plan in the same way as being mentioned here.

And I certainly welcome that particular part of the document on page 7 of it, where it refers to the people in the rural areas, and I wish we could work together, both in the County Development Plan and this particular aspect of it as well.

Thank you, chair.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

We have a proposer from Councillor John Mullen. Can I get someone to second the plan?

Councillor Tom Fortune.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Can I make a quick --

CATHAOIRLEACH: Oh, sorry. Go ahead, Councillor.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Can I just thank Deirdre for presenting it. And, as she said, she's presented it to districts and SPCs, so we have heard it several times. And, for me, I think it is a great document, but it is only as good as its implementation.

So I think you can pick up already from the members, you know, what it is provoking, the comments from the speakers so far.

So I would think, briefly, just the bottom line is, you now have to blueprint how are we going to deliver it? What are we going to do with it?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

Are you seconding it as well?

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Yes.

CATHAOIRLEACH: So it is proposed by Councillor John, Mullen, and seconded by Councillor Tom fortune.

Is that agreed?

(Agreed).

CAOTHAOIRLEACH: That's agreed.

Deirdre, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it. Okay, members, we are going to move on to the next item, and that is: "To consider and approve the County Wicklow Disability & Inclusion Steering Strategy 2023 to 2028."

And Laura Callaghan is here with us. I would also like to just acknowledge the presence of Councillor Miriam Murphy. This committee and this strategy has been something that Miriam has personally led on, and I think the fact that she is present today,

given her loss, is a testament to that, and just to express our sympathies, Miriam, from the whole chambers for you on the loss of your father. We are thinking of you.

Laura, we have given a ten-minute limit to all presentations. If you can keep to that, that would be very much appreciated.

Thank you very much.

MR NICHOLSON: Sorry, Cathaoirleach, just a few brief notes before Laura -- some of you might not know who Laura is. Laura works at DFI, Disability Federation of Ireland. We were the first local authority -- in fact, we are the only local authority in the country to have a relationship with DFI, where they provide services to us on a service-type agreement basis, and it has been an absolute godsend having Laura in DFI, because we have the full knowledge, the full importance of DFI in all our matters, and I think the members will agree, you can see the results across the county of that expertise.

We were the first local authority to adopt the sunflower lanyard. We have hidden disability progress-based project under way. We are the first local authority to have changing places within a public building. That has now spread Avondale. We have two now in the county, and more to come.

This strategy has been -- it was mentioned earlier by Breege that nothing in the Climate Action Plan was written without consultation. The same thing applied here. We consulted widely in this plan before we wrote anything down. It has been widely consulted over the past year, led by Disability Inclusion Steering Committee, which is a great committee.

And I am just going to hand over to Laura. She is going to make a presentation on it.

Start it for ten, Laura.

MS CALLAGHAN: Perfect. It's just a very brief introduction again. It is our Disability Inclusion Steering Committee, some of which you are members of.

So we started in around November of 2021. It is a really unique structure. There is no other local authority in the country that has something like this, that brings together people both internally within the Council and externally in terms of different community groups; the PPN, we have our two SICAP providers in Wicklow Tourism, Age Friendly, we CYPSC, we have the local sports partnership, with people from the key departments are elected members, and everyone really coming together, so it makes it very easy for cross-departmental work and for everybody to know what is happening across, whether it is SICAP programme, something that Wicklow Tourism are doing, so that we know and make sure it is accessible to tourists and visitors coming into the county, and it is just really a space for anything related to disability and inclusion to come up.

We have been working, as I said, since 2021 mainly online, because we set up in the Covid space. We started going out there a little bit, having some more events. Last year, we launched our toolkit. Some of you might have heard about a toolkit for the community groups and local sports groups, so they can be more accessible and inclusive. So it is really wide-ranging, what we are doing, and really innovative.

So I have gone into some of the reasons, I suppose. It is coordinated, it is streamlined, it is unique at the moment, but I think it is also coming down the tracks for other local authorities around the country.

We are looking at the United Nations Convention, and the rights of persons with disabilities is going to be something that each local

authority will have a hand in implementing over the next couple of years, and, essentially, the government will need to give some kind of approach to how we are going to do that local level, and I think we will hopefully be ahead of the curve on that, because we have already been doing it for the last couple of years.

Those responsible for designing and delivering services as well to support people with disabilities at a community level; so like I was saying, the social inclusion programmes, the sports partnerships, they are at the table as well, which is unique. So it means that they are not just kind of putting together programmes based on stats or based on things they are reading; they are actually putting them together based on people with disabilities at the table with them at that DISC committee. So that is a really crucial part, that we have people with disabilities there as well. We're not just asking them to come to a public consultation every now and again. They're there at the table all the way through. And that's from all different corners of the county as well.

It goes beyond physical access. It focuses on a coordinating approach. So it's not just the physical, it's also the information that we send out, how accessible is that to the public; the hidden disabilities side of things are -- it's our parking spaces, yes, but it's also our loop systems, and making sure that if somebody comes in for, example, a housing meeting, that they can have a sign language interpreter there, and that our customer service staff know really well how to handle that and where to book that in.

If we move on to the next slide there.

So the strategy, then, came about as part of the disability and participation grant that came about in 2021. We applied, and our

toolkit, as I mentioned, was one of the projects we did. This was the other.

So we started putting this together really as a roadmap for ourselves on what DISC wanted to focus on for the next couple of years. We did a public consultation throughout each of the five Municipal Districts. We went to the Tinahely show. We weren't that popular. We didn't have free pens. But we did get a few people to engage with us and give us their thoughts on disability. That all went into the strategy. We had an online meeting, and then we also had something up on the consultation hub for a while, just asking people to input their thoughts there.

So that was all drafted together. We have an idea now of where people's priorities lie in terms of disability, and we aim to launch then next month what we could come up with so far.

We thought for a while about the vision for this strategy, and then I came across this picture, and when I showed it to the committee, they kind of said, that is the nail on the head, that is exactly what we are going for. It is this idea of equality versus equity. And it is not same for everybody across the board, it is equity. It's giving people who needed a leg up where they need it. And it is just showing that this county can understand the value of equity over quality, is accessible for all and celebrates the fact that we are all different, but equal.

So we split up into three action areas for the strategy. So the first one focuses on participation, communication and rights. And it looks at facilitating space where all stakeholders can come together and, crucially, where people with disabilities can come into that space as well and make their own voices be heard, and that they are very much involved in all of this and what is happening.

I'm not going to read it all, because we won't have time. If you want to go on to the next one, and then there's a few examples at the end.

So action area 2, then, is around community participation, accessibility and universal design, which fits everybody. So that goes in a little bit more into the actual physical accessibility of things, whether that is the accessibility of information, but also our roads, our playgrounds, our public amenities as well.

And you can see that we have already made some strides around that. We have done some accessibility audits in places like Glendalough and the Bray seafront. We are working on our hidden disability as well. We are really proud of it.

The third action area, then, is employment, housing and recreation. And we are very much aware, drafting this, that some of the biggest priorities that people have around disability is around health services and different services external to ourselves; I suppose, transport.

So we tried to, as much as we could, put in what is within our remit within Wicklow County Council's behest to actually help with, and how we can liaise with people like -- whether it is Irish Rail or Bus Eireann to make things a little bit more accessible, but knowing that we can't solve all problems. But there is a lot there on employment, housing and recreation that we can do. So that is all gone in as well.

So if we move on to the next slide there.

So that will just give you an idea of how the strategy is constructed. So the first one there is the item on the strategy, I suppose. The second column that we have is the UNCRPD reference. So I notice -- I mentioned there before that we have

the United Nations Convention and the rights of persons with disabilities that has been ratified the last number of years. There will be an implementation plan coming from central government for that. So I really hope that when the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission come knocking on the door to Wicklow County Council and say, can you tell us what you are doing around Article 27, that we can say, yeah, that is what we are doing, and we have been doing it for the last five years. So we are well out of the traps ahead of anyone else, and it is linked back there to national policy all the way.

Then we have our action, we have our clear measurables, we have the lead, and the partners responsible, and our timeline. That is probably a very poor example from the timeline, but for the rest of them, we tried to be as specific as we could. So we got rid of the acronyms. It's not Q4 of whatever year. It is by January 2026, we want to have this done, and this is who is responsible. And that is a range of partners, and you will see that throughout; so we are trying to make sure that everybody has a responsibility under this.

Moving on to the next one there.

So some of the other aims that we had with the strategy was to recognise the existing work and promote collaboration across services. So you will see there is already fantastic work happening in the county, and we wanted that acknowledged.

So rather than just coming up with brand-new ideas, we wanted to make sure that things that are happening that are really good continue to be funded and continue to happen.

So one of those things is, there's so much going on in our library services. One of those is assisted technology. So we now have devices, like C-Pen Reader, that a kid who has dyslexia, or an

adult who needs help with reading can go in, and, like they rent a book, rent this assisted technology device, put it on the page, and it would read it for them in audio. And they are available in our libraries across the county. So to make sure that we continue to provide those kind of things.

The appropriateness of existing parking options are reviewed. So again, we have already started to roll out different initiatives around parking, like the one in Bray, where people can look at their app and see where exactly the accessible parking is or the hidden disability spaces. So we want more of that, and we want it extended across the MDs.

The other strategy aim we had was to use available resources and link the strategy to other relevant legislation and policy. So I suppose part of the benefit of the partnership that you have got here with the Disability Federation of Ireland is that, hopefully, you have an eye on what is going on nationally and what is there already.

So rather than coming up with a whole new guideline, I have already got some queries in from different communities around the county asking me, how do we make our playground accessible? We are getting together with the local GAA club. We want to put in a playground. Can you give us some advice?

There's already a National Disability Authority standard there. So we are pointing them to that, rather than trying to come up with something different.

There's already a plain English style guide there on public sector. So it is about implementing that here. It is not about recreating the wheel. So there is a lot of that.

Next slide, please. We're nearly there.

Just to make everybody responsible for a culture of inclusion

across the organisation as well, and across all their schemes of work.

So you will see that we have 63 active travel projects across the county. So again, it is not about us doing our accessibility audit or walkability audit of the town and saying, we need this footpath fixed, we need this stitched. It is work that is already happening, what the engineers are already doing, and then linking in with them to make sure that that is all accessible.

The same with, you know, what the HR team are doing; there's guidelines there already on working with people on reasonable accommodations. So let's start doing that in-house, before we start hopefully working with chambers of commerce and other people around Wicklow to get their staff working that way.

Again, the Bray Harbour redevelopment, we have got a line in that where the engineers are now going to be looking at accessibility as well as everything else. It is all about working with what is there.

And then finally, just to link to existing Wicklow County Council documents. So you will see some of the aims of the strategy will reference back to the age friendly strategy, where they look for things like colostomy bag changing shelves; so that is something that is very relevant to disability, too. So we are repeating that to make sure it happens all around.

And then just to support the objective of the outdoor recreation strategy as well. So again, we are linking in to what is already happening with the sports partnership, and making sure that we are supporting in -- them in that where there is crossover.

So I think that is the final slide.

You are welcome to ask any questions, or hear any thoughts.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Laura, thank you so much for that. Exactly on ten

minutes. So well done. Well done. Much appreciated.

So we are going to open it out to the floor. I am looking for a proposer and seconder. So I am going to open this first up to Councillor Miriam Murphy.

COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Thanks, Aoife. And thanks to everybody today. I am going to try not to cry. Tears of probably happiness and joy and sadness, and all of that together. But I couldn't miss today, because today was the whole day of why I went into Council, to be a councillor, because I felt that people were making decisions about where I went, what I wanted to do, where to live, where to go to the pub, and everything else, and these people didn't know me, and I felt I had to be at the table for to help with decisions, and I think, as Michael Nicholson always says, you will die happy, Miriam, now that is launched.

And look it, my father made me what I am and who I am today, and I am so proud to propose this. And I would like to thank Laura and Michael, and all the people who have sat at the table. And I don't think we really had major rows. We might have had meltdowns, but we had never had a major row. And I am just so proud today. And I am so proud of Laura and Michael and the whole team for their participation and their work. And especially the funding. I mean, we can't be anywhere without funding, and today proves it.

And I would like to propose this, Aoife.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Miriam.

Councillor Tom Annesley.

COUNCILLOR ANNESLEY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

Councillor Murphy, you're some woman. Well done. And I am in awe of you. And your father is so proud of you today.

Just to get back to the business that is on the table. Laura, thank you very much for a great presentation. And Michael, well done. And you have a proposer. And I'd be very honoured to second it, because everyone in this chamber knows the difficulty I had last year, and all the help that this Council gave me, and it is a disability as well, so I would be very happy to second this proposal.

Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Joe Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Yes, Cathaoirleach. You know, you would want to have a heart of stone not to be moved by what Miriam said there today. I mean, she is so genuine and sincere, and on such a sad day for her and her family, that she made it her business to be here to propose this, which is really the cumulation of so much work that she personally has done.

And I remember Miriam before you were a councillor, and I was in the Dáil, and you used to be in contact with me about different issues in Arklow, and I can see exactly where you are coming from, that you really wanted to be where the decisions were being made. And it is a magnificent, I think, legacy to you and to your father that we are discussing this today and that we are moving, I suppose, forward to improve the lives of people with all sorts of disabilities.

So I say well done to you, Miriam, in particular, and also to Laura for the magnificent presentation that you gave. Laura, not only was it within time, but it was very, very relevant, very on point.

There is just one point I would like to make. It is not in the document, but I think we should all be aware of it, because it has

the capacity to have major impacts on people with disabilities up and down this county and up and down this country, which is the Government decision to introduce a discussion about having a work capability assessment approach to payments for people with disabilities, which may well end up being mirrored to what has happened in England, where people with some disabilities are being denied their benefits because they're being told that they are able to work.

Now, it is only a discussion at the moment, and I am only really aware in the last few days about what is being said about this, but I think we all, as public representatives, and the people we represent, we should be very clear about what is at stake here, and I think, as a Council, we may, and should at some stage in the future arising out of this policy, discuss this and whether we should be making a submission to that public debate.

Before I finish, Cathaoirleach, can I propose an extension of time, in case we need it, just to pass those motions, if we need them, you know. We may not need it, but can I propose a time extension, please?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Absolutely. Can I get a seconder for that time extension?

Councillor Tommy Annesley. Thanks.

So is that agreed by all, to half five? Thank you.

Councillor Melanie Corrigan.

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Yes, I think it is a very proud day for Wicklow County Council, and one which I am certainly delighted to be associated with.

Miriam, I think you have spoken absolutely wonderfully, and you also, Laura, and thank you to yourself and Michael, and everyone that has worked on this.

I am a parent of a young adult with a disability, and I think Wicklow is a fantastic county to bring her up in, and her friends and her colleagues, and I think we are a role model for other counties to -- the whole of Ireland to follow suit, and make lives better for people with disabilities and their families. And I just think it is a very proud day, and thank you for all the work you have done. And I'm just delighted that I was associated with it.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

Councillor John Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. First and foremost, sincerest condolences to Miriam and her family, and if I could just say, you know, you have a proposer and a seconder for this strategy, and I suppose you couldn't have two finer people to put this forward to the chambers, and not because of their disabilities, but because their passion and their drive for this; both have been equally as vocal since I have been on the Council with them.

And I was lucky enough, Cathaoirleach, probably about six years ago to sit down with Laura for a number of hours in regards to the discussion around people with disabilities, and particularly the impact it has on the social aspect of it, of housing, and I know that Laura has gone through every section of Wicklow County Council with a fine tooth comb.

And the reason I don't have a question, I just want to commend you, because there's an awful lot of disabilities out there that are obvious, and not so obvious. There's people with disabilities in all walks of life. And it is about giving people an equal playing field. It is about putting the roof over their head, that

it meets their needs. It is about giving them a fair and equitable chance at getting decent employment; the Wicklow County Council fly the flag on that.

Almost 15 years I'm in here, and they've always been to the forefront of giving people with disabilities an opportunity for employment. It is about people wanting to get involved in sports, and making our sporting facilities available to them. It is about the community and cultural and social aspect, and making sure that everybody is included.

And that is why I fully endorse this, and I want to commend the people who have put their shoulder to the wheel, and particularly to you, Laura, because I know the amount of work you put into it. In regards to Miriam, I just want to commend you again.

Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thanks very much, Councillor. Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

Thanks, Laura, for the presentation.

The graphic -- I teach social justice principles in college, so I have used that graphic every year with my students to provoke them, to give them an insight into what we mean by equity, giving people what they need, when they need it, in order for them to have opportunities that are already afforded to others. So I think it is powerful to include that.

I think, from my experience, and watching even Miriam in action over the years, the strongest part of the strategy that stands out for me is the culture of inclusion, and a culture -- for me, culture is how we do things around here. That is what culture is, in all its shapes and forms: How we do things around here.

So if we can create a culture of inclusion, then that means that

we are paying attention to how people are presenting what their needs are, and how are we equipping ourselves to respond to them rather than hide from them or ignore them or say, we will get around to it.

So I think there's a powerful message when we talk about a culture of inclusion. And one experience I had last weekend, I was working with a group of young people, and, again, I think it resonates very much with how Miriam operates; they said to me, we want to see a time when it's not expected of the person who is experiencing the exclusion to always be the one who has to campaign, who has to champion, who has to lobby, who has to fight for change, that the people with power and responsibility and positions of authority, that they should be doing that very naturally and very sincerely, because that is how we should do things around here.

And I know that every meeting that I come across you at, you have the same message that it shouldn't have to be Laura standing up to say, is this going to be in plain English? We should all be saying that and valuing it equally.

And I think -- I would say -- the last thing I would say is that I imagine, I know from my MD, that it's -- the issue of this really comes up at every single meeting, and I think that is also a testament to the work of Miriam and yourself.

Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Peir Leonard.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: I would just like to also commend Laura, but most of all Miriam, my colleague down in Arklow. She, I think, you know, as an independent female councillor, that she is just so strong, and I think she has paved the way to make things easier for people, which is what we all want to do, and make a good

future for people in our county.

I think there's a lot of support groups out there for people with disabilities that need to be acknowledged as well, and linked in with your committee, Laura. I know in Arklow, there's two fantastic new groups set up to support parents of children with autism and ADHD, and I'd just like to give them a little mention. All kinds of Amazing and Little warrior Group down in Arklow. And they would love to kind of get involved and feed into what you are doing.

I also think that there is a huge gap for adult children -- adult children -- or adults -- children that become adults with disabilities, especially with autism. I think there is a real lack of supports out there. Once they finish the services and stuff like that, families are left with no support, and I think that that is something that we need to concentrate in our communities. So I hope this plan will incorporate that.

And then, just lastly, the biggest amenable leisure facility that we have are our beaches in County Wicklow, and I think that to create accessibility for anybody that has a disability or that's ill, or, you know, just to see the sea and to put their feet in the water would be the greatest achievement that we could do over the next year.

Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

Councillor Paul O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR PAUL O'BRIEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you to Laura for that presentation and for your commitment for inclusion.

Can I just say that I concur with what Councillor Behan said about Councillor Murphy; you would want a heart of stone today not to be

emotional about Councillor Murphy's contribution. And I know how much it means to her here today. We have all had families that have had disabilities. My grandfather had motor neuron. And it is only when you start to -- like, I take it for granted I can go everywhere, but it is only when you start dealing with the likes of people like that that you come up against the challenges they face. Simple things like just getting up on a kerb to continue their journey down main street. So it is very emotional not just for everyone here, but it is emotional for everybody outside the chamber here too that has to endure day in day out challenges. And I have been asked to make a proposal here today that as a demonstration of our commitment as councillors that each MD look at donating or contributing a thousand euro to fund some of the stuff that needs to be done to have people inclusive. And I think it would send a strong message out to not just to this report but to all the people of our commitments.

I would like, if I can make a proposal, at least that each councillor brings it back to their MD and discusses it and maybe puts a discussion forward for a thousand euro towards the works that need to be done. I think it is a small amount of money that could go a long way.

So thank you very much, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thanks very much, Councillor.

Councillor Tom Fortune.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

First of all, condolences, Miriam, on the passing of your dad. Yes, I think, Laura, the job you have done is fantastic. What I would like to suggest is that a copy of the report should go to all of the boards of management in the secondary schools across the county. I think it would be very welcomed with all of the

boards I would imagine. And I think because the topic we're talking about touches everybody irrespective of age, and with the stresses that school children have been under obviously coming out of Covid and since, and the pressures they are under, I think it is something that if it was imbedded into the culture of the schools, and I would concur with what Dermot says, he is spot on. I suggest we do that. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

Councillor Grace McManus.

COUNCILLOR MCMANUS: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I just want to say briefly, like, there's so many reasons to like Councillor Murphy and my particular one is she was very kind to me during the pandemic and used to give me a phone call after meetings to say how are you getting on there now, are you isolated and what's the news, and have a bit of a gossip and a laugh. So just always very kind, even behind the scenes.

And, Councillor Murphy, I am so sorry for your loss, but this piece of work is so admirable. And to yourself, Laura, as well. I got to watch some of the committee, not as much as I would have liked to, but the work that went into it, it's phenomenal. And I just wanted to make a comment that I hope that this encourages us to also think about how we do our work as councillors, there's things that we can do to make our work more accessible today: making social media posts, thinking about doing image descriptions or if we are doing a press release making sure that anybody who is reading it might understand, or offering online meetings if someone can't get to a physical place to meet us. So I hope that, as Councillor Dermot said, we have a: How are we going to do things? And us councillors have to think about that as well to make our practice inclusive also.

But a huge well done. And thanks, Laura, for the presentation. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

Councillor Lourda Scott.

COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And I just wanted to say first, I am a very new to this committee but I just wanted to start by saying, Councillor Murphy, you're absolutely a legend. Like, my absolute condolences on your loss. But I am just thinking what you achieved during your term as a councillor, like, if I could achieve half that much I would be retiring a happy woman. You really are a role model to so many women. And again, I just want to acknowledge the work of Laura as well. I mean, having her post in Wicklow County Council is really phenomenal. And I have been onto Laura over lots of accessibility issues around my constituency, before I got to join this committee I know her and she is just a fantastic resource, and always takes the time to get back to you and share her information no matter how busy she is.

I just want to make a couple of points.

One of the things with this report is, I hope it will flag to people that not every disability is visible and nor does everybody want to identify their disability as well, and I think that is particularly true of young adults, you know, teenagers, and just that you need to be mindful and aware of that particularly when you are dealing with constituents or your dealings with anything really.

Councillor Leonard actually said the very comments on the beaches which is exactly one of the key things I was going to mention. One of the most frequent things that gets raised to me from young families in my area is about the lack of accessibility to the

freest, most beneficial for physical and mental health that we have in Wicklow, and that is our coastline. And that particularly was raised to me during the pandemic, when again so many able-bodied people took up sea swimming, went for walks down by the beach, running, all the rest, cleared their head, the mental health benefits were talked about ad nauseam, but yet there were so many of our community that were not only prohibited from doing that because of maybe a specific person in their family that has a mobility issue, but that the rest of the family were also prohibited because obviously they weren't going to isolate the person that couldn't get onto the beach.

I just want to mention one of constituents in particular. Their little child had a disability and she wrote to me several times. I passed on the messages and tried to work as best as I could on their behalf to get access down to our water. And unfortunately their little child passed away during the summer and they never had that magical experience of being able to go down with all of the family by the water's edge and either dip their own feet in water or, you know, observe the happiness of the family and they all be together by the water's edge that we take for granted. And that is just a small example of one of the areas where at the moment we have a lot of work to do.

The second point I just wanted to make is I would like to second Councillor O'Brien's proposal regarding each district considering putting aside, ring-fencing about a thousand euros in each of the MDs, to put towards the calls to action on this report. And I will certainly bringing that up in Greystones MD at our next meeting.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. Councillor Gerry O'Neill, I

know you're coming in there. I am just going to get some items done just because I am conscious that we have to stop at half four to take the suspension of standing orders. So if you could just bear with me for two second.

We have a proposal, Councillor Miriam Murphy, and a seconder, Councillor Tommy Annesley, for the report, for the strategy. And I presume that is agreed by all here? Perfect. (Agreed).

We have a proposal, Councillor Paul O'Brien, and a seconder, Councillor Lourda Scott, for a motion for each MD to are consider putting aside a thousand euro. That will obviously be up to each MD to discuss themselves. Are we agreed that everyone will take that back to their MDs to discuss? (Agreed) that is perfect.

Thanks.

Councillor Gerry O'Neill I am going to bring you in now. We have to stop at half, Gerry, if that is okay to bring in suspension. The floor is yours, Gerry.

I just can't hear you there at the moment. No. Still not hearing you. I don't think you are on mute either. No. I'm so sorry, Gerry, I can't actually hear you and you're not on mute there, there may be a problem with the sound on your end, I think it might be. I will bring you back in after the suspension of standing orders if you want to see if you can get that working there. No. It is not coming through.

Okay. We will take the suspension of standing orders. I will hand it over to you, Helen.

MS PURCELL: I get to try on my new reading glasses!

We have received a suspension of standing orders proposed by Councillor Joe Behan, seconded by Councillor Tom Fortune: "That this Council views with extreme concern the fact that two separate and distinct proposals to construct bus lanes on (i) Castle

Street, Bray and (ii) on the N11 between Fassaroe and Glen of the Downs being progressed without ever being formally discussed at any meeting of Wicklow County Council despite the fact that they will have extremely negative repercussions on local Bray people and businesses in the case of Castle Street and that many thousands of motorists and commercial drivers in Bray, Enniskerry, Kilmacanogue and surrounding areas in the case of the N11.

That this Council therefore calls for the following actions to be taken: (i) that the NTA removes the bus lane planned for Castle Street, Bray from the BusConnects scheme submitted to An Bord Pleanála, and (ii) that the proposal by Kildare County Council, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, NTA, TII and Wicklow County Council to close permanently the N11 access to and from the Herbert Road, Enniskerry Road and many other minor entrances and the proposal to install traffic lights on Hills Roundabout be withdrawn and the funding for the major N11/M11 Upgrade scheme be restored by the Government."

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. Councillor Joe Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks to colleagues for agreeing to take this suspension. There are two aspects to it. I will come back to it in a moment. People may have different views on each of them. But I am kind of forced into taking this action today to put this motion before you, because in fact we have never actually discussed either of these proposals properly at this forum or in Bray Municipal District, and they have huge ramifications for people in our Municipal District particularly but also for people who travel in and out of Bray and Enniskerry and Kilmacanogue.

And one of the things I am concerned about is that what has happened is a non-statutory public consultation process, and

people are given an email address or an address here in this building to express their views. And I can tell you the views of anybody who has contacted me is very, very much against both of these proposals. But just to say that there is nobody actually who is going to be making the decision named on the public consultation. But people are looking to us as public representatives to voice their concerns and yet we never had an opportunity at a Council meeting to voice those concerns.

So the non-statutory public consultation is ending on the 13th of October, Friday the 13th, which may be appropriate, but at the SPC meeting last Monday - transport SPC, of which I am a member - we were told that the preferred route would be published, in other words the result, would also be announced in October, which means that for the many, many people who are currently making submissions they are entitled to ask the question how seriously are their views going to be taken. That is the first point.

The second point is that the people who are on the committee who are making this decision are made up of engineers and officials from the Kildare County Council Roads Office, which is kind of an offshoot of TII, but it is based in Kildare County Council. So you have Kildare County Council-based officials, officials based in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Council, people in the NTA, people in TII and a small number from Wicklow who are going to be making a decision that is going to have huge ramifications on the people of our county.

Now, the reason for this is, and we have all agreed I think unanimously here, we want to see the main N11 road improvement scheme funded by the Department of Transport, but it has been brought to a standstill by the Minister for Transport, Eamon Ryan. And we have all agreed and we have gone on consultation looking

for that funding to be restored, because if that happened we would have a scheme that would help people on the N11, help to install bus lanes, but also ensure that people of Bray, Enniskerry and Kilmacanogue can still move freely in and out of the N11. That's being stopped. And what we got, in a cynical move in my opinion, at the beginning of July was the Minister said you can go ahead and have your bus lane. A bus lane on the N11 that would be put on the hard shoulder, that would mean that all the main entrances that I have mentioned would have to be closed permanently. And I just don't think it is good enough.

Now, what I would say about this is that there has never in my experience, and I am a long time a councillor, in my experience there has never been an issue that has activated so many people who are deeply angry at what they look at as an imposition on their lives without them ever having a proper consultation process or having their public representatives involved in any discussion about it.

I have been forced into holding a public meeting myself next Monday because there is no forum for people to come as a group and express their opposition to this. And I think it is regrettable that we are in this situation, but we are.

So what I am asking members first of all in relation to the first part -- sorry, the second part of the motion, which is to kind of send a clear message to this committee who are going to be deciding, within a week maybe of getting the public submissions in, that we are not going to accept this, that we are not happy with it, that we want the full scheme put in place which is what should have happened all along instead of the Minister deciding to stop the funding. So that is part number one. Sorry, part number two, part number one of what I am saying.

Part number one of the proposal which is a little bit more local but it involves the NTA installing or proposing to put a bus lane between Ravenswell School, so just past Supervalu, if you like, up to the bridge at the bottom of Bray town. And they have the power to go ahead and do this without reference to any of us yet again because a predecessor of the chief executive, who we all remember, along with other chief executives in the Dublin area, gave away the powers of chief executives in the greater Dublin area to the NTA to make decisions about bus lanes and things like that so they don't have to be bothered with us councillors.

So now we're faced that NTA have published a plan, they've told a number of businesses in Little Bray, in Castle Street, that basically their entire frontage is going to go, the places where people park their cars are going to be removed for a bus lane. And what is going to happen for those of us who know Bray? The buses, whatever buses there will be there, will speed up 200 metres and get stuck at the bridge anyway. So all of this upset is going to be caused really for no value.

Now, it's gone to An Bord Pleanála. I'm not sure -- we can't really tell them to take it out. So I understand this motion may look like it's not realistic, but I think we have to do something to express our feelings about this on behalf of the people again who are going to be affected in Castle Street.

So that is my proposal, Cathaoirleach, and thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

Councillor Tom Fortune.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Yes. Well, Councillor Behan has said it all but I just want to say that I fully support and endorse what he has said.

This idea that we don't have any discussion before this kind of

thing has landed is -- you've heard me talk about these things before, it is gone beyond a joke at this stage. It is really, really serious and out of control.

I did raise a question earlier on the CE's report on the NTA. I have been observing and watching what has been going on myself as well, and that is why I asked the question. I think the NTA is a body now that is answerable -- another body that is answerable to nobody. Certainly local public reps are being totally ignored. It seems they can do what they like. I am also really interested in this area, because I have got family living in Bray who have been onto me about this particular issue as well. And I think Councillor Behan deserves to be fully supported, so I fully support and endorse what is going on.

But I do have serious concerns, and that is why I highlighted in CE earlier, about the NTA and what they are doing because I am aware of two projects in my own district whereby there was a plan put into place to do two different projects - I won't get into detail now because it is not relevant to the discussion - and the NTA then decided at the eleventh hour to take a section of the district out of the two projects, no consultation, no discussion. You know, just get on with it and project just goes ahead, and the local authority obviously has to follow whatever instructions are handed down the line. And I have massive, massive issues with what is going on in that whole area.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

Councillor Derek Mitchell.

COUNCILLOR MITCHELL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Yes. I would like to strongly agree with Councillors Behan and Fortune about the N11 scheme.

The main scheme which has been worked on for five years at the

cost of in the region of 5 million does contain a parallel road to take the traffic from these two closed junctions, so it can actually move and rather than forcing it back into Bray. So this is not just a Bray or Enniskerry issue; it will create in my view enormous traffic jams.

Also, Minister Ryan decided to cancel or postpone the main scheme in 2022 and also this year no work has taken place in spite of five years of work beforehand. And I think it is disgraceful to come up with this plan which will create all the problems which we are hearing about.

And what also must be thought about is that the Municipal District of Greystones has expanded by 15%, that of Wicklow and Rathnew Municipal District has also expanded by 15%, including Newtown, Ashford and Rathnew. So this enormous expansion of compilation has taken place and if you look at any of these towns there are houses going up everywhere. So not only has he cancelled the road which was needed well before this growth but he is actually ignoring the growth. And I think it is very important that this gets going as quickly as possible. And I understand that a budget 4 million will be needed for the next phase which will take about a year to get planning permission for the main scheme, and I am urging that we ask the Government for this immediately or at least in the budget for next year so that we can get going on the proper scheme rather than postponing it even further, and I think it is absolutely vital.

In terms of the bus lanes within Bray, I understand the point about the councillors not being consulted or not having the power. Personally I would like to see a better route for the buses through Bray. I don't know any of the details of this scheme but it does affect the service to Greystones. And we had the people

who run the 184 bus out in Greystones Municipal District at our recent meeting and they said that the traffic in Bray Main Street does create problems. I realise this is not on the Main Street so I don't particularly want to judge that issue, but it is an issue. But the main N11 scheme, it has to go ahead. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

Councillor Melanie Corrigan.

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

Yes, I would have to completely agree with Councillor Behan on this one. It just doesn't seem to make sense. And again, with Councillor Mitchell here, we have to send a strong message that the main scheme has to be progressed.

Some of the things that were proposed in the main scheme made complete sense, whereas this doesn't make any sense. And it is the lack of information on both schemes, the one in Bray and the closing off of the Herbert Road and Enniskerry Road, the lack of information that we as councillors got as well is very frustrating. We are the ones going out and telling the population, all our constituents.

The website, I have to actually add as well, is very, very difficult to navigate. I have had a huge amount of people contact me. They might have read my Facebook post or seen the article. They go into it, but they can't understand it. I don't know. I mean in this day and age it should be a lot easier to get information from websites like that.

But closing those two main arteries in and out of Bray just does not make sense. I would agree some of the smaller exits could be closed and a lot of those would make it a lot safer, but these are two main arteries; people trying to get in and out of Enniskerry, it won't close off the village, but it will create huge problems

there. Some of the other roads that will be used, you know, it is going to take people a lot of extra time out of their day travelling in and out. Traffic on roads that cannot support it. Last year we did a huge work on the Herbert Road, putting footpaths in, extra lighting and crossings, and now to actually close it just doesn't make sense. We had six weeks of the road being closed and it was utter chaos in Bray but people put up with it because it was for six weeks. But this, on a permanent thing, it just can't happen and I think we really have got to send a message from us all that it can't happen.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach and thanks to Councillor Behan and Councillor Fortune for raising this.

Again, the contact that I have had from constituents on this, I think it kind of feels like a tragedy of local democracy, Cathaoirleach. And I am not just throwing that out there. Like, I have read through my documents for the meeting today and then I got Councillor Behan's email, and then I go back to the LECF and it says: "Greater accountability and transparency in decision-making. Decisions based on local priorities. Improve local participation in decision-making and delivery." Absent. And the expression that comes to mind is, and again without being over the top: There's a democratic deficit in play here for me, Cathaoirleach.

And what is a democratic deficit? It is when we are faced with a scenario where there is limited participation, where there is lack of transparency, where there is concentration of power, where there is weak institutional frameworks and there is a lack of

responsiveness and trust. And people will say this to us, they will say, why would we vote for you? What is your job? Why are you in there? Sure, what do you be doing? Taking a wage and maybe, as Councillor O'Neill says, going on trips?

And in the language of the website, you know, I see a project team doing an exercise to complete a project, and that's where their rationale comes from. Complete the project. And the project says put a bus lane in. How will we do that? So to me it seems very distant from the reality of the people on the ground, Cathaoirleach. And I would be very concerned and I absolutely support the motion. And I really think we need to reclaim that territory, because to be a county councillor with a democratic deficit is almost embarrassing at this stage. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

Councillor Ann Ferris.

COUNCILLOR FERRIS: Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

I just want to say that I fully support Councillor Behan's motion at the meeting. Now, it is not every day that I would be in support of Councillor Behan 's motion but on this particular occasion I am very happy to.

I don't know, I think this project is being carried out piecemeal and, you know, I don't know if thought has gone into it at all. I am not going to repeat what everybody else has said because I agree wholeheartedly with what has been said. I think it has to go back to the drawing board.

But I would also thank Councillor Behan for organising the public meeting in the Glenview next week. And I would urge our local councillors to attend as well to hear what people have to say, but I think we're in no doubt of what people are thinking from the amount of correspondence we're getting and the amount of posts

that are being put on Facebook.

I would urge people though if they feel strongly about it - and I know that they do - to send in an official submission to the N11/M11 team. The email address is widely available.

I note that there have been a number of people starting petitions on Facebook and I am not too sure that the team will accept petitions, you know because it is just easy to sign something, or people may feel pressured into signing something. So I urge people to send in a proper submission.

I just think this has been done without any thought. I don't know, I think the headline on the front of the Wicklow Times today said "Locked in, Locked out". It seems like they're trying to stop people getting into Bray, and, you know, it just cannot be supported. And I just hope that the people involved on the project will hear the voices of the local councillors in Bray and indeed in the Greystones MD and revise the plan.

In fact, if I had my way, if there's room to put in a bus lane on that stretch of the road, I would put in an extra lane for cars, because at the moment the congestion first thing in the morning and at teatime is just crazy. And so, that is what I would do, rather than putting cars off the road. Because let's face it, there are people who have to go to work, go to school or whatever, who, you know, getting the bus doesn't get them to their destination so they need cars.

But I would urge people to send in their submission before Friday the 13th of October.

Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

Councillor Gerry Walsh.

COUNCILLOR WALSH: Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

And just to concur with previous speakers firstly with the original plan. I know we were told here at the September meeting a delegation met with the TII there back in late August and the report back was that it would going to take 2.5 million to complete phases three and four of that plan. Now there's already 3 to 4 million, if not more, already invested in the first phases, then we're told, you know, it is just being paused indefinitely when we pointed this out over and over in this chamber. It is just not acceptable. So I think the original plan needs to be back on the table ASAP.

In relation to the closure of Herbert Road and Enniskerry Road, it just doesn't make sense to me percolating all the traffic up. And Hills roundabout, installing lights there, that is just going to create total mayhem there at that particular junction, so it just doesn't make sense.

The obvious, traffic needs to go to the Herbert Road area in Bray. And as Councillor Corrigan pointed out, it was closed for a significant period for improvement works and now it is open and working well and now we are here talking about closing it again. It just doesn't make sense.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

From my own perspective and just to declare that I do live beside Hills Garage so I am directly impacted, and I just can't understand how we are not planning the whole thing. I mean, when I speak to residents and neighbours of mine, I mean they accept that there is going to be an impact on their homes, they accept even that there may be an impact on their land, but they are just saying let us know what it is and plan it out. This piecemeal approach of we will do it one way but now we are doing something

else is actually causing a lot of upset and distress locally. It is not the right approach. It is not the way to do things. It is very, very poor.

So I am just going to invite Leonora in. And just maybe for clarity as well, Leonora, if you do know, because I think you are right, Councillor Ferris, there are a number of different online petitions. There is obviously the public meeting that Dr Behan has organised which I assume people will -- I'm not sure what will come from that. There is a lack of clarity on what is the official path to go. And what I wouldn't like to happen is that people are signing online petitions thinking that that has been their response, if there is an expectation that they email in. And then, if the only expectation is that they email in, that again is not accessible to everybody, so is there an alternative? So just maybe if there is an opportunity to clarify any response on that.

And then, just I suppose for the members and looking at next steps, there are two separate issues here. One is related to Castle Street and then one is the N11. So I am not sure if you are able to, but if you can clarify what are the options for the members here on both of those issues, because I think, Councillor Behan, you may have to take them both separately but they are part of a wider inclusion. Thank you, Leonora.

MS EARLS: Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

I might just take the BusConnects first.

So BusConnects is a project from the Dublin City centre out as far as Bray. It is an NTA programme. The NTA are responsible for provision of the bus network services across the country and this is under the public service obligation that they have to provide bus services and to look at where the need is. So in this

instance it's the increased growth is resulting in increasing the bus network around the city centre right out to Bray. So it is an NTA project.

My understanding is that there were some, around three rounds of non-statutory consultation on it, but in August of this year NTA lodged the application with An Bord Pleanála for the project and this is where the submissions are invited up to the 10th of October to An Bord Pleanála. So I certainly would encourage everybody to take the opportunity to make a submission. The transportation team here are engaging with the district engineer in Bray also about bringing forward a submission in relation to that.

So that is that particular issue.

In relation to the N11 bus priority entrance scheme. No different to the members, we were, within the executive, very disappointed and continue to be disappointed that funding was suspended for the main scheme. We believe that the main scheme is what is required on the N11. But the funding was suspended and what funding was provided related to an interim scheme for a bus priority scheme. So that is what is being progressed at the moment. I would say that it is only at the preferred option stage, it has not gone to design stage. So there is a bit to go on this as yet.

So I suppose just around some clarity. Submissions are invited up to the 13th of October. Now, we can extend that date if we feel there is a lot of information coming in or if we feel, for example, we need to do an additional note or an additional drawing for people for them to see and understand in the event of the exits and entrances being closed off the N11 what are the options. So, for example, the closure of the Herbert Road, we were very conscious last November of the issues that arose for that

temporary closure to provide for a footpath and the long queuing that it then caused on N11. So a lot of modelling has been done as to how we can prevent the queuing arising on the N11 where the Herbert Road would be closed, and that modelling shows that we need to upgrade Junction 7 to increase -- improve the efficient and balanced flow of traffic at Junction 7. We have also looked at, in the alternative, of linkages between -- to kind of allow for the closure of Herbert and the closure of Enniskerry Road, providing link roads between -- to Junction 7 and Junction 6 to kind of mitigate against those closures.

But, as I said, we absolutely welcome the feedback, we want to hear from people, and if we need to extend the date we will certainly do that.

I would also say that we are taking every opportunity that we possibly can to keep the main scheme on the agenda and within the radar of the people who might be able to assist us. So most recently we met with the Minister for State, for Transport, Jack Chambers, and again put forward our preference that the main scheme is a scheme that can address the deficiencies both from a safety point of view but also from effective operation of the N11. But, as I said, the interim bus scheme is a scheme that we have funding for at the moment, so that is what is being progressed. But, as I said, we will listen to all the feedback, if we need to extend the date we will do that, if we need to provide additional notes on link roads and the rationale for the closure of the junctions, but also we are also looking at what the wider impacts are of the closures in relation to the movement of traffic in and around Bray.

Again I would say to the members that this is at preferred option stage. There is no design yet. We do a briefing on the 11th

September with the members and we can continue to do that and if members want us to come back in and do more briefings or presentation as we move through the process we can certainly do that.

Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Leonora.

And I know, Councillor Leonard, you are looking to come in.

Just can I get clarity then, because there's two -- as part of the suspension of standing order Councillor Behan has asked me for two things. One is that the NTA removes the bus lane plan for Castle Street, Bray and the BusConnects scheme submitted to An Bord Pleanála. And I suppose what I am trying to understand is, is that a request this chamber can do or is that something that has to be done as a submission? The second part of the motion proposed by Kildare Dun Laoghaire NTA, around the Herbert Road, again is that something that members here can actually take a physical action on? Thanks.

MS EARLS: Sorry, Cathaoirleach. In relation to the first item, I would suggest that, yes, if the members are agreed, that they would make a submission. And we can, you know, make that submission as a result of the motion here today to NTA in respect of the BusConnects scheme. In relation to the second part and not proceeding with the closure of the junctions, again that can be a submission -- if the members agree, that can be a submission to the current non-statutory public consultation, but if they wish to go to the Minister it's also open for them to do that. So they may wish to decide to write to the Minister for Transportation and TII if they wish. And we can certainly facilitate that for them.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thanks. Thanks very much, Leonora. I appreciate that.

Joe, I will bring you in. I am going to let Councillor Peir Leonard in first.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Yes. I was just going to actually ask something similar. I was just going to ask could we make, if everybody was in agreement, a joint submission to An Bord Pleanála as members as part of it?

CATHAOIRLEACH: And Councillor Joe Behan?

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Yes. Thanks, Leonora, for your I think very clear advice there. And I see John Bowes is over there on the other side and he has done an enormous amount of work on this whole project as well and I know he is listening to what is being said very carefully, and has done at the SPC meetings.

So I would suggest that we go with what Leonora has said. If members, the majority of members agree, that that fact is reported to An Bord Pleanála: That the members of Wicklow County Council at a discussion today have agreed to ask An Bord Pleanála -- or to ask the NTA and ask An Bord Pleanála to refuse -- to consider that or to include that element. This is in relation to the bus lane in Castle Street. And secondly, if again the members agree to the other part of the motion, that it goes as a submission that the members of Wicklow County Council today at their meeting decided to request that working group to halt the work on this particular aspect of the proposal and again call on the Minister to provide the full funding for the main scheme. Sorry, that is a bit complicated.

CATHAOIRLEACH: No, no. No, I understand.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: If the motions were passed, I think we can work with it then after that. That is all I am saying.

CATHAOIRLEACH: No, I understand.

Tom, just as a person -- are you okay with that proposal?

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Yes, a hundred percent, yes.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Perfect. Do we have anyone not in agreement in the room or online? No? All in agreement?

MS EARLS: Sorry, Cathaoirleach, could I just clarify, this is on the N11 submission to the email address, do you also want to send it to the Minister?

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Yes.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. We're all in agreement. (Agreed). That is great. Thanks very much.

Thanks, Leonora, for your assistance on that.

Okay, just moving on from that, we have, is Councillor O'Neill still on the line?

COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: I am.

CATHAOIRLEACH: And I can hear you, Councillor O'Neill. I'm really sorry, I couldn't hear you earlier on. Do you want to come in?

COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Well, it is only just briefly there to thank Laura and Michael Nicholson on probably one of the most powerful presentations I have heard in a long, long time, you know, on disability. And, you know, it is encouraging. I would like to endorse what Councillor McManus has said there, mainly that we all as councillor should, you know, maybe buck up a little bit on it. And I know for one there, as a councillor for ten years now, we have a disabled girl in the family, it is a constant struggle. Even today, you know to get the bits -- Councillor Glennon would be very familiar with cases in rural Wicklow, people with disabilities in rural parts of Ireland are really a little more disadvantaged than others, you know.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes.

COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: And he gets the same request as I do from

people in the area. There's a lot we can do for people with disabilities. And that presentation, definitely it woke me up a bit, it made me stop and think. And I would just like to say well done to Michael Nicholson and Laura there for that presentation. And I'm sorry for the problems I had there with my microphone.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Not at all.

COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: I appreciate you letting me back in for those few words.

CATHAOIRLEACH: No problem. Thanks, Gerry. Appreciate it. Okay. We will just move onto the next item on our agenda which is correspondence.

MS PURCELL: Just a few items of correspondence.

Want to note the circulation of circular LG05/2023 which relates to a security allowance for local authority members to enhance personal security. Details of that are going out to all the elected members. If you have any questions, please come back to us on it.

Also to note the circulation of protocol minutes from the 8th of May, the 12th of June and the 3rd of July.

Just to make the members aware there's a caucus event tomorrow with the women travellers at 11 o'clock here in Council chamber if anybody wishes to attend. And also to remember the LPT meet something next Monday at two o'clock. So we have another meeting next Monday. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: That's great. There's no other items. So that concludes our meeting today.

So those who are members of the Protocol Committee, if you could hang on and we will start that meeting in a couple of minutes. Thank you.

(Time noted - 5:02pm)

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